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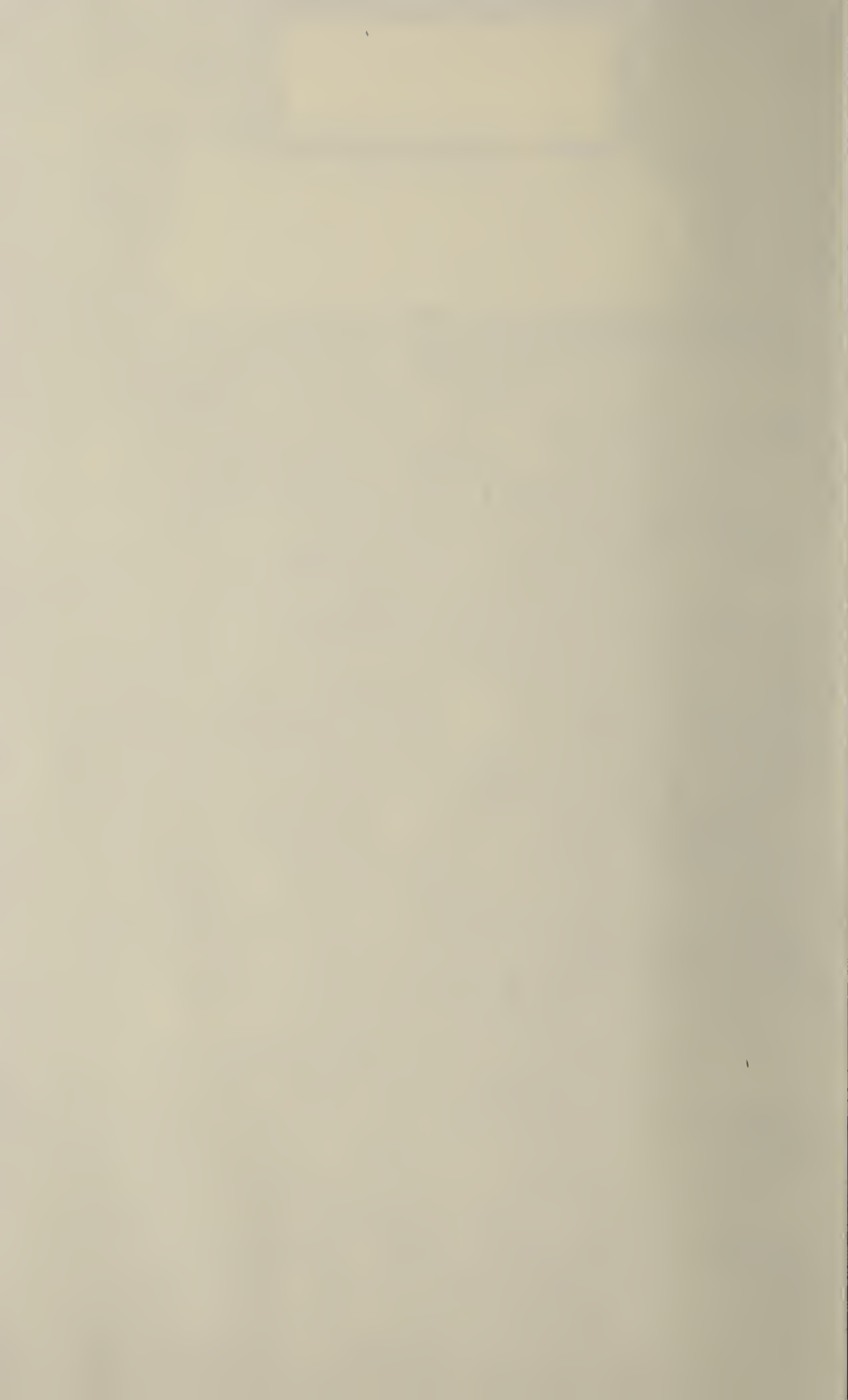
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The story of the Second

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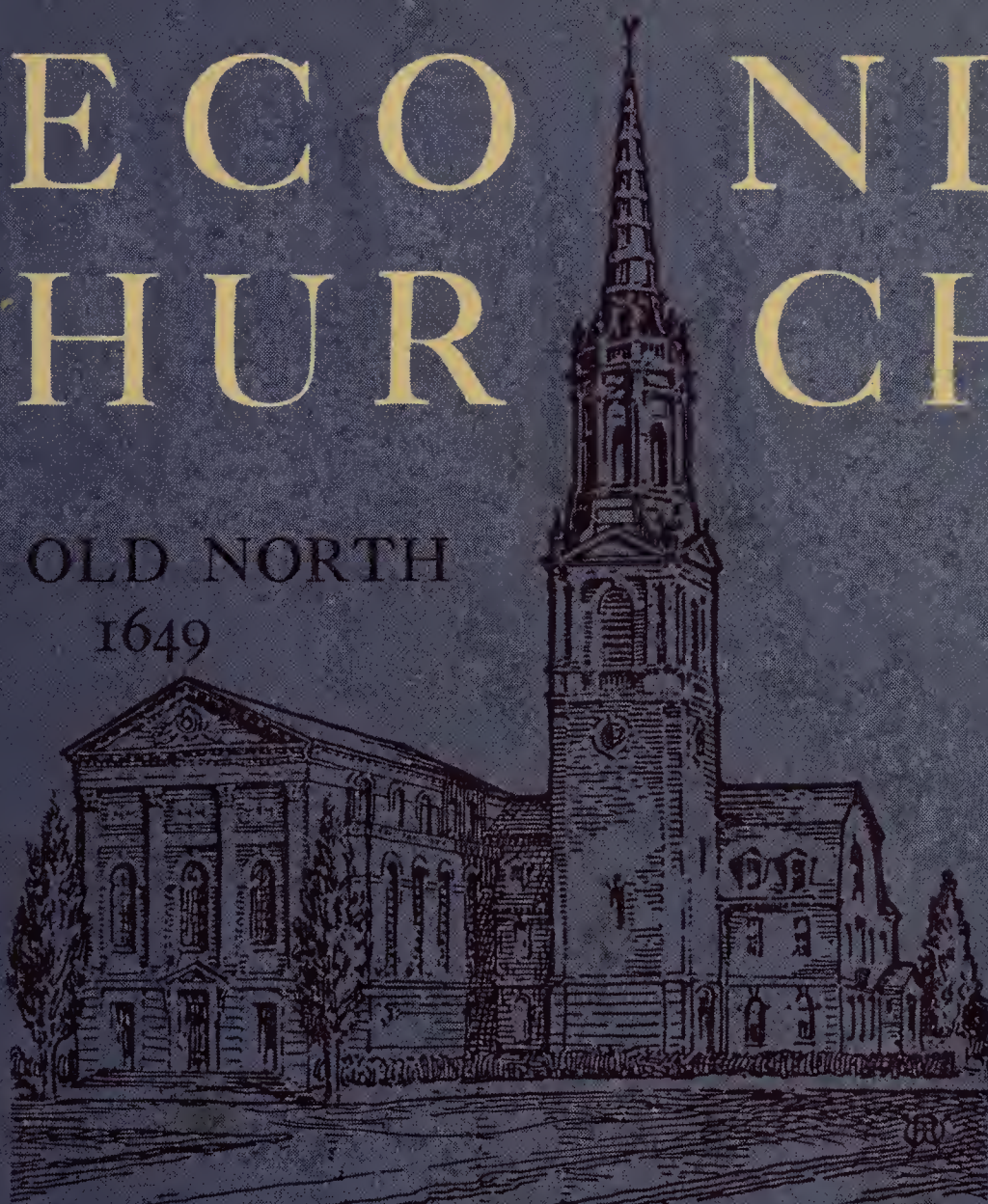
original Old North

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THE STORY OF THE SECOND CHURCH

THE OLD NORTH
1649



BOSTON



BY JOHN NICHOLLS BOOTH

A lively account of Boston's second oldest church and its links with American history from 1649 to the present ★ ★ ★ Cotton Mather and the witch hunts ★ ★ ★ Ralph Waldo Emerson surrendering the pastorate of the Second Church ★ ★ ★ Increase Mather giving up the presidency of Harvard for this pulpit ★ ★ ★ the three Second Church pastors who were chaplains to the Massachusetts Senate ★ ★ ★ Henry Ware, Jr. and the founding of the American Unitarian Association ★ ★ ★ Why the Paul Revere lanterns were almost certainly hung in the steeple of this church's ill-fated edifice in North Square and not elsewhere as widely believed.

GEN



THE STORY
of the
SECOND CHURCH
IN
BOSTON
(The Original Old North)

Including

THE OLD NORTH CHURCH
MYSTERY

by

JOHN NICHOLLS BOOTH

Boston, Massachusetts

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ILLUSTRATIONS CREDITS

We are indebted to the Massachusetts Historical Society for the engravings of Cotton Mather, Paul Revere and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

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On the 310th anniversary of the founding of the
Second Church in Boston this historical study
has been published with the assistance of the
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INTRODUCTION

On its 310th anniversary the Second Church finds itself located at the heart of the capital of Massachusetts and in the center of a metropolitan district numbering over 2,800,000 persons. Twenty-eight colleges and universities, seventeen museums and innumerable organizations devoted to fine arts, music, drama, literature and the dance contribute to this city's reputation as the "Athens of America."

Throughout all but the first nineteen years following the birth of Boston the Second Church has lived on, often participating influentially and courageously in the life, work and progress of its community. An intriguing procession of names, events and theological issues notable in American history appear in the annals of this church.

Cotton Mather and his father, Increase Mather, not only built the Second Church into the most influential and perhaps largest church in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries New World but shaped uniquely the initial years of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Ministers of this originally Puritan congregation were among the first in the country to repudiate a harsh Calvinist theology and to advocate a more spiritual approach to religion and worship. The church became avowedly Unitarian in 1802 and, through its pastor, helped to found the Unitarian denomination in America 23 years later.

One pastor finally resigned the presidency of Harvard rather than give up the Second Church pulpit. Another minister left this church to become a revered professor of homiletics in the seminary at Harvard. Three clergymen served as chaplains of the Massachusetts Senate. America's foremost man of letters, Ralph Waldo Emerson, served this congregation — the only pulpit in which he ever settled during his ministerial career. He went on to preach the revolutionary Harvard Divinity School sermon, the second most important Unitarian address in this continent's religious development.

Some of the lay members were Royal Governors of the colony before independence and others were elected Governors of the

STORY OF THE SECOND CHURCH

Commonwealth after it. A Second Churchman fell in the Boston Massacre; another designed and built the frigate *Constitution* ("Old Ironsides"); Boston was led through the terrible days of the Civil War by a mayor from this church; still another constituent became the national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic.

These 310 years of history have seen recurring heartaches, setbacks and errors as well as stirring moments of greatness and insistent pressures to make Boston a worthier community. And now, occupying its eighth building, The Second Church in Boston has arrived at the age of atomic power and space flight. Willing to change and grow with the times, despite its age and traditions, the Second Church is currently going through an internal transformation of deep and abiding significance. Perhaps the record of its past, proudly though sometimes critically told, will stir it to even finer efforts in the future.

It is said that the birth of our nation began on April 18, 1775 when secret lantern signals in the North Church steeple set the machinery of war and independence into motion. The church that played this historic role, I am now fully convinced, was actually the Second Church in Boston, then located in North Square and known far and wide as the "North Church" or "Old North Church." Except for a letter to the Mayor of Boston in 1876, from the historian Richard Frothingham, I have been unable to find any documents examining affirmatively the Second Church's participation in that episode. Therefore Appendix A is almost entirely an original construction, in reasoning and research. It constitutes perhaps the most thorough and exhaustive examination ever made of the entire question. I have tried to err on the cautious side, even to not taking advantage of higher estimated elevation figures for North Square, in Boston, and Town Hill, in Charlestown, in 1775, that would further enhance our case. The result is laid before the public for the first time, in this book, hoping for a favorable verdict that may rectify a long-standing error in historical identification.

I am indebted to Clyde W. Hubbard, professional engineer and

INTRODUCTION

present chairman of the Second Church Standing Committee, for his elevation surveys, map studies and development of a profile in connection with the lanterns debate. I am grateful to my wife, Edith, for spending many hours researching old records and modern books for threads of information concerning the Puritan and Revolutionary War periods of the American colonies – their customs, ideas and contributions. With my secretary, Mrs. Phyllis Holloway, she typed the sometimes almost indecipherable drafts of the manuscript. My appreciation extends to Gobin Stair for aid on the cover and to Mrs. Nancy Davis for valuable suggestions and editorial work. The flattering picture of the writer and the helpful map of the North End are due to the generosity of Robert A. Davis, distinguished New York City portrait artist.

J.N.B.

Chapter One

IN THE BEGINNING

The brilliant Elizabethan Age had burned itself out. Strong-willed Englishmen, anxious for civil and religious independence, were pouring into small, sail-driven vessels headed for the grim wilderness across the seas.

One day in 1630, a group of Indians watched uneasily as the square sails of the *Arbella* slowly pushed the first colonists' ship into Massachusetts Bay and landed its passengers on the hilly peninsula of Shawmut.

Boston was born.

Sixteen more ships transported an additional two thousand English people into the Bay that first year. Almost all of the settlers were of Puritan sympathies. Under Governor John Winthrop, they erected a one-story, mud-walled and thatched-roof structure, with crude benches and pulpit.

The First Church in Boston was founded.

The massive migration continued. By 1641, three hundred vessels had made the slow, lurching cruise over the Atlantic and brought in twenty thousand colonists. The majority settled in Boston and the neighboring communities of Roxbury, Charlestown, Dorchester, Cambridge and Watertown. The First Church in Boston could no longer handle the religious needs of the five thousand citizens who, by 1649, comprised Boston Town.

The Second Church in Boston was established.

A site was chosen in the North End, a section not easily served by the First Church even though the town was scarcely larger than the present size of New York's Central Park. No ecclesiastical organization or member of the clergy was responsible for the founding of this new church. It was the creation of seven Puritan laymen; a democratic, people's church from its very inception. Although the congregation lapsed for short periods from purely democratic principles, it always returned eventually to its original genius speaking out courageously for the religious, intellectual and political liberties of the common man.

The incredible dynasty of the Mather family, destined later to lift this new church to unexpected heights of influence, touched the congregation fleetingly during the first months in its new

wooden edifice. Samuel Mather, the eldest son of the Rev. Richard Mather, who was settled in nearby Dorchester's parish, delivered the dedicatory sermon on June 5, 1650. Mather was a member of the second class to graduate from the newly-established Harvard College in Cambridge and was the first "fellow" of that institution. After filling the pulpit for a few months, he rejected an invitation to become the settled minister and sailed for England to establish his residence there. Ultimately he became chaplain to the Lord Mayor of London.

Without another trained clergyman in Boston to call upon, the little group gathered each Sabbath to hear sermons by Michael Powell, one of its founding members. His eloquence inspired a desire in the congregation to ordain him as pastor. But the General Court, noting that he lacked "academical education" and anxious to exalt the rough little pioneer town as an intellectual center, refused him ordination, saying: "He might have talents and a fine spirit and still not be competent to instruct the educated, explain the Scriptures, and convince the unbelieving . . . in such a place as Boston."

After worshiping five years without a seminary-educated pastor, the congregation installed the Rev. John Mayo on November 9, 1655. The "difficulties and discouragements" that had prompted John Mayo to leave his parish at Nosset, in Plymouth County, did not make the Boston group reluctant to place its own fate in his hands. This unprejudiced spirit was to appear many times, in numerous guises, in the years stretching ahead.

Such status was accorded ecclesiastical institutions in those days that even small churches were accustomed to engaging two ministers. One was designated the pastor, and the other was named the teacher. The duties were somewhat similar, although inevitably one incumbent assumed most of the pulpit work. On March 27, 1664, the Second Church in Boston ordained as the teacher of the church and associate of the aging John Mayo, a youth named Increase Mather, the sixth son of the Rev. Richard Mather, pastor of the Dorchester church. He was accepting a pulpit call that his brother Samuel had declined fourteen years earlier.

A brilliant period for Boston, for this church and for the name of Mather was ushered into existence.

Perhaps no family has ever occupied so unique a position in church circles as the dynasty begun in Boston by Richard Mather. It extended through four generations, embraced a period of 150 years, and produced eleven members for the ministry. The Mathers published more than five hundred different works, largely on religion, but also touching political problems, legal questions, witchcraft, astronomy, mathematics, science and medicine. Four Mathers served the Second Church in Boston: two of Richard's sons, Samuel and Increase; his grandson, the famed Cotton; and his great-grandson, Samuel. To this day, the institution is often called "The Church of the Mathers."

It is interesting to note the preparation undergone by Increase Mather before he took up his ministry in a small colonial town. Entering Harvard College at the age of twelve, he withdrew after twelve months in order to receive several years of private tutoring. This was felt necessary because of his health. A precocious lad, he graduated from Harvard at seventeen and was preaching regularly the following year. In 1857 he sailed for England, obtained a second degree after a season of duties at Trinity College, Dublin, and then preached for various congregations during the next three years. But his nonconformist views were drawing him toward disaster. Finally, like his father years earlier, he felt compelled to leave England for the new country shores, where his lifetime career in the Second Church in Boston soon began.

He had been associated with the church only eight years when Mr. Mayo, his voice so enfeebled by age that his parishioners could scarcely hear his messages, resigned and moved to Yarmouth, where he died in 1676. Michael Powell, that gifted lay preacher, had preceded him in death by three years. Poverty had saddened Powell's final years. The church gladly paid the full ten pounds and four shillings for his funeral. The division of the funeral expenses may cause unknowing eyebrows to elevate! *Five pounds, fifteen shillings were spent for gloves; three pounds, seventeen shillings for wine; six shillings for a grave; and six shillings for Mr. Powell's coffin.* This disproportion appears to

be explained by the month in which the funeral took place — January. Last rites were lengthy affairs, with interminable prayers and sermons; only liberal handouts of wine and gloves to the mourners could make the midwinter ceremony tolerable in a relatively unheated Puritan meeting house.

Under the inspired and energetic ministry of Increase Mather the church was reorganized, grew and prospered, until it became *the* church of Boston. Even the church's total destruction by roaring flames in the November 27, 1676 Boston fire did not deter its forward march. On the same site in North Square, a new building that was to be the pride of the colony for nearly a century thereafter rose toward the sky. Later called "The Old North Church", it would figure prominently in American history. This patriot church became a "nest of traitors" to the British Tories; from its steeple the Paul Revere lanterns were almost certainly hung. Finally, at the start of the American Revolution, the edifice was torn down by soldiers of the King.

Dr. Increase Mather developed into a courtly and dignified gentleman, knowledgeable in many fields, and unflagging in his production of written treatises, an essential personage for all civic functions of note. He was a man of imperious presence, possessing a powerful voice of such effect that (his son once wrote) his "hearers were struck with awe like that produced by the fall of thunderbolts."

He worked on his sermons every day in the week except Sundays, completing them by Friday and spending Saturday committing them to memory. The pews in his meeting house were soon packed with eager worshipers and remained that way throughout most of his sixty-year ministry.

Various enticements across the years failed to draw him from his beloved pulpit. He accepted the notable honor of the presidency of Harvard College in 1685 only on the condition that he could reside in Boston and continue as minister of the Second Church. In his effort to prevent the college from leaving the Calvinist realm for the more liberal fields into which it would eventually move, he aroused animosities that finally undermined his position. The overseers of Harvard took a tactful means of

easing him from office. Their ultimatum: "Either give up the Second Church and move into Cambridge or else resign from the presidency of Harvard College." Increase Mather didn't hesitate. He chose to remain with his church. He had given the distinguished school sixteen years. He was the grateful recipient, in 1692, of the first Doctor of Divinity degree awarded in America.

Dr. Mather applied his religious principles to the key political issue of the era. King Charles II had revoked the charter which the Puritans had brought with them from overseas. In changing from a chartered colony to a royal province, Boston would lose many privileges and liberties. Only Increase Mather, both in his pulpit and in the crowded Town Hall, dared to stand up and oppose the Royal Commissioner and his partisans. The King's representative, Edmund Randolph, arrested the clergyman for defamation, and a suit for five hundred pounds was leveled against him. A courageous jury acquitted the minister. Another attempt to arrest him was narrowly averted by some vigilant friends.

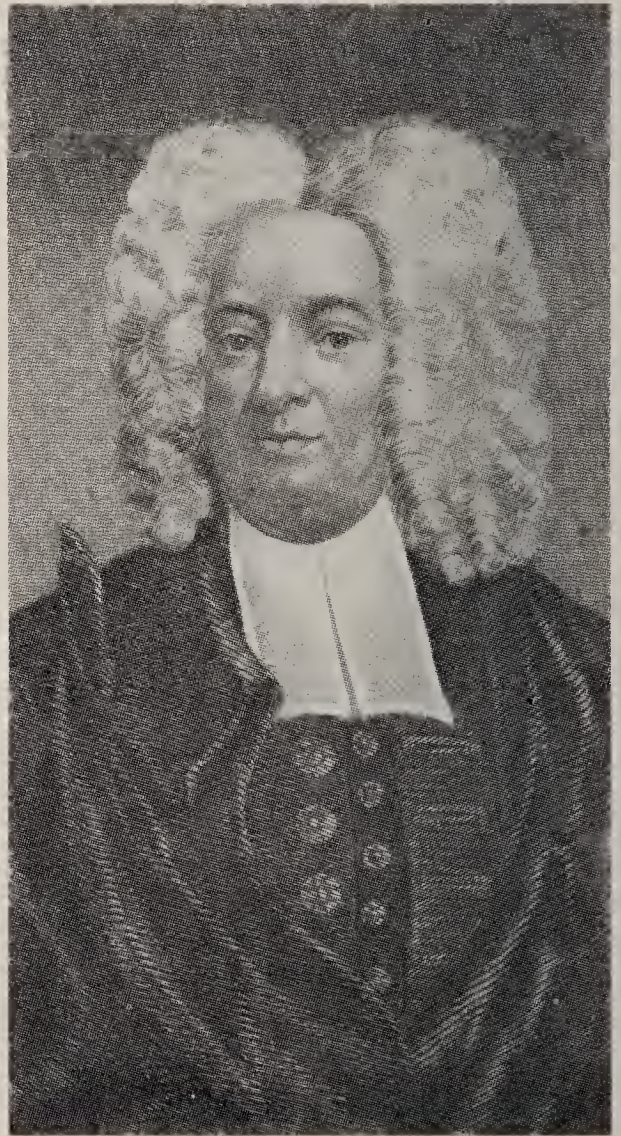
In one last desperate attempt to secure a charter similar to the one under which they had lived so happily, the colonists decided to send Dr. Mather, the most learned and eloquent man in the colony, to see Charles' successor, James II. The local government tried frantically by every means to prevent the emissary from leaving his country. Legal methods, searches, arrests and guards all failed. Disguised as a woman, Dr. Mather crossed the town and, after being rowed out into the Bay, was smuggled aboard the sailing vessel *President*, shortly after it had been thoroughly searched for his presence.

The American colonist enjoyed several pleasant interviews with King James II, successfully negotiated with courtiers and commissioners of the monarch and, after four busy years in England, returned to Boston with a new charter. He was unable to abrogate the change of the colony into a province but did secure the incorporation of Maine, Nova Scotia and the Plymouth Colony into the Province of Massachusetts. King James II allowed Increase Mather to select the new Royal Governor. A native New Englander and member of the Second Church in Boston, Sir William Phips, was appointed. The courage and statesmanship of Dr.

Mather prevented a potential rebellion, strengthened the position of the colony and insured the preservation of several imperiled civil and religious freedoms.



INCREASE MATHER
Second pastor, Harvard president



COTTON MATHER
Third pastor, prolific writer

Chapter Two

THE GIANT WHO WENT WRONG

During this turbulent period Increase Mather did not realize that he was raising a son who would become the most world-famous of all New England preachers. His eldest boy, Cotton, at the age of eleven, could speak Latin readily, had gone through most of the New Testament in Greek and had done considerable work in his Hebrew grammar. He received two degrees from Harvard with marked distinction, one at the age of sixteen and another at nineteen. An impediment of speech made him despair of entering the ministry, but, like Demosthenes, whose eloquence he later would emulate, he finally overcame this stubborn defect, enabling him to give up medical studies for his real love, theology.

In the year that Increase Mather added the presidency of Harvard College to his other responsibilities, Cotton was ordained as his colleague in the Second Church in Boston. Probably the educational post became feasible for the father when much of the church's administrative load could be assumed by the son.

Puritanism was now approaching the zenith of its influence in America. It must be remembered that the Puritan migrants to the new continent were not mere adventurers. Most of them were well-educated and deeply religious. Some were persons of means and scions of the aristocracy. They had come out of the Church of England seeking greater strictness of life and simplicity of worship, believing that in spite of the Reformation a sufficient divergence from the Roman Church had not taken place.

The Massachusetts Bay Colony was a carefully planned theocracy where the Puritans could establish their own prescribed way of life, free of the restrictions that had surrounded them in their native land. Eventually they were to deny as many rights to non-Puritans as they had complained were kept from them in England, a not unknown state of intolerance into which many extremists eventually descend. The Mathers, together with the other Puritan pastors of the time, were accepted authorities on most questions: religious, political, legal and medical. Calvinists all, their theology and their God were harsh. They divided all men into the elect and the "damned" and believed every word of the Bible in its most literal sense. This uncritical reliance upon

Biblical authority later led to Cotton Mather's sad belief in witchcraft and his terrible role in the New England witch hunts.

Probably neither Theodore Parker nor Abraham Lincoln, in penning their famed one-sentence description of democratic government, realized that the Englishman, Wycliff, was its true originator. In 1384 he wrote the phrase that later fortified the Puritans' desire for a Bible-based society. The scriptures, he asserted, were to be used "for the Government of the People, by the People, and for the People."

Calvinism's doctrine of the elect was bound to produce undemocratic results. The franchise was limited to church members. This disbarred eighty per cent of the populace from voting. Anyone opposing the union of church and state might be expelled, like Roger Williams, from the colony. For one man to dissent from the rest of a jury was a punishable offense in the earliest colonial days. The freethinker was considered a dangerous man. The parson's sermons were studied carefully for lapses from prescribed dogma. Opportunities to discover heresy were many, for sermons often lasted one to two hours; any shorter discourse would have been considered superficial and irreligious.

Cotton Mather proclaimed that not one word in the New Testament authorized such aids to devotion as the organ. Only the violincello and bass viol were acceptable for religious instrumental music. Not until the eighteenth century did the liberals begin to win their fight for the installation of pipe organs in New England churches. For some years thereafter many pillars of these churches considered the services no longer religious.

Despite his objection to the pipe organ, Cotton Mather joined his father in helping to reform congregational singing. They shuddered to think that this aspect of Puritan worship had reached its nadir. Music was chiefly in the form of Psalm singing, each line being read by an officer of the church before the congregation vocalized it. Each note was dragged out long and mournfully; the key was often too high; and little effort was expended to remain in tune. This problem was compounded by the constant repetition of many almost unsingable versions of the Psalms, to which playful worshipers would add surreptitious quavers and extra notes.

Cotton Mather published in 1718 a new translation of the Psalms, called the *Psalterium Americanum*, in which he made it possible to adapt the verses to tunes of different meter. Even a simple and practical reform of this nature was not easily achieved. Many parishioners resisted any form of change as sacrilegious.

The edifice in which Second Churchmen then worshiped was called a "meeting house". The word "church" sounded too Popish for the Puritans. The pulpit resembled a desk and sported an hourglass to help time the lengthy prayers and sermons. The women sat together on one side of the building while the menfolk occupied the other half. Everyone stood during the pastor's prayer, although the aged and ill were permitted to sit down at the halfway point. They could remain there until the praying stopped, sometimes nearly twenty minutes later.

Into this unique ecclesiastico-civic environment had stepped Cotton Mather. He was but twenty-three years old when he became colleague, in Boston's leading church, to an illustrious father whom he was soon to outshine. Before his life was to terminate forty-two years later he would have built up the largest private library in America, produced some of the most significant literature in existence on colonial times and left a legacy of 382 printed works, many of them sermons. Benjamin Franklin stated that he attributed his own eminence and usefulness to what he learned reading Mather's *Essays To Do Good*.

Such avalanches of opprobrium have been heaped by history upon Cotton Mather for being the arch-representative of an age that almost universally subscribed to a superstitious belief in witchcraft that it is just and wise to balance this with a description of this great man's opposite, and notable, achievements. His community services were legion, his charities beyond number. He anticipated by at least a century a long list of reformatory and benevolent societies. He struggled to improve the condition of seamen in the busy port of Boston. He constantly advocated the increase of education and more rights for women. To provide opportunities for the slaves then being held in New England, he established a school for them and paid all the expenses out of his own purse. He urged the establishment of libraries and associ-

ations to further the interests and character of tradesmen. His theories on the education of children bear a remarkable resemblance at many points to the more progressive attitudes of our own day. Twentieth-century clergymen would heartily rejoice in Cotton Mather's innumerable works in the public welfare.

America owes much to Dr. Mather's courage and persistence for the eventual vanquishment of smallpox. In the course of his enormous reading schedule, the minister learned of a method of inoculation successfully employed in Turkey. He persuaded Dr. Zabdiel Boylston to test the method which ultimately proved successful.

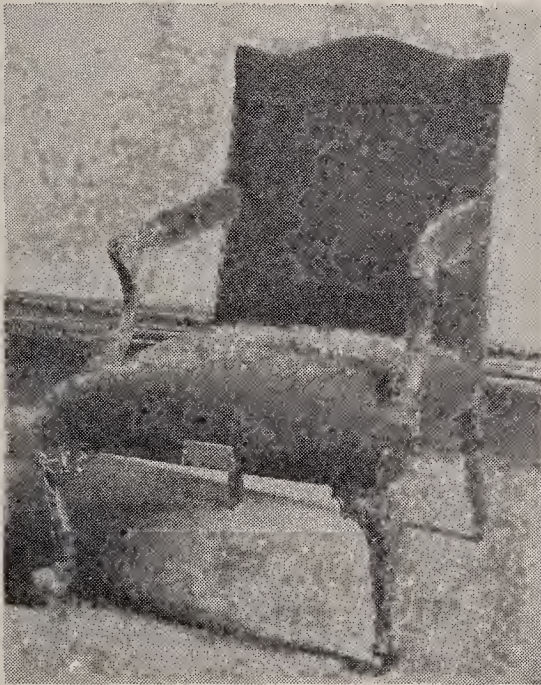
No one expected that the other physicians of Boston, backed by an angry citizenry, would react so violently to the experiments. Mather and Boylston were denounced publicly as murderers and hunted by mobs carrying ropes and threatening to lynch the innovators. A makeshift bomb, capable of killing the minister and destroying his home, was hurled into his bedroom while he slept. Fortunately the fuse was dislodged before the explosive could detonate. A note tied to the lethal object read: "Cotton Mather, you dog. Damn you, I will Enoculate you with this, with a Pox to you". To this day, men of science and religion occasionally suffer public wrath when they advocate experiments in advance of their time.

During Cotton Mather's long ministry the Second Church in Boston enjoyed uninterrupted fame, influence and mass support. Mather's industry was ceaseless: reading, studying, writing, speaking, and working. Visitors who did not realize the value of time were quietly reminded by a sign on his study door: BE SHORT. Yet no one was ever turned away or deprived of a chance to speak his business fully. In an effort to come nearer to God in sacred meditation and gain a quickened sense of his own inadequacies, he regularly fasted two or three days each week.

It is curiously heartening to trace the gradual liberalization of the Mather family as it served the Second Church. Increase Mather was always stern, narrow and dogmatic in his Calvinist theology and attitude toward science. From his father Richard, he had inherited an unbending zeal in perpetuating doctrine un-

changed. In contrast, Cotton Mather threw off many of his own earlier superstitions and traveled far in advance of most ecclesiastics of his time on nearly all of the main issues between religion and science.

Cotton Mather accepted the Newtonian astronomical theories despite the charge that they were atheistic concepts. He de-



COTTON MATHER'S

Chair in today's church chancel
be treated with utmost civility.

nounced the idea of a divine origin for Bible punctuations. He resisted the notion that comets are signs and wonders. His broad tolerance of other faiths is manifest in his declaration that "persecution for conscientious dissent in religion is an abomination of desolation." He wanted no rails about the "Lord's Table": anyone could partake of communion. He insisted that the Quakers, whom he personally disliked and who were persecuted by the community, must

The loosening of Calvinist shackles from the Mather family minds reached its climax in Cotton Mather's son, Samuel. After nine years' service in the Second Church, he became the only minister to suffer a forced resignation in the parish's long history. The charge: looseness of doctrine! Old Richard and Increase Mather probably revolved in their graves over this ultimate heresy; but I suspect that the harried scholar Cotton Mather only sighed deeply. The Mather family dynasty in Boston began in orthodoxy and ended in liberalism, a pattern that delights the modern Second Church.

Posterity has the tragic habit of remembering men for their mistakes and obliterating the good that they have performed. The memory of Cotton Mather is overly soiled by his singular role in the fiery witch-hunt orgy that swept New England. A leading

Biblical scholar of his age, the clergyman took literally the Judeo-Christian injunction: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." He was aware that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries leading thinkers of Europe firmly believed that the Devil worked among men through witches. In those two centuries, 100,000 "witches" were put to death in Germany, 75,000 in France, and 30,000 in the British Isles.

A sorry product of his age in this respect, Dr. Mather wrote his *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcrafts* in 1689 while still a young man. By continual, eloquent preachments, he stirred the imagination and inflamed the passions of the public. Neither ambition nor vanity, but a genuine conviction that he was fighting evil, drove him on. He must shoulder the principal responsibility for inciting the colony to its actions. Fortunately, the witchcraft craze lasted only forty years and took but thirty-two lives in New England — a modest tragedy compared with the two centuries' blood bath in Europe. But a deep and popular revulsion soon occurred that blighted the remainder of Cotton Mather's life and hastened the end of Puritan theocracy in New England.

The influence of the Mathers was over.

Increase Mather continued his ministry in the church until his death on August 23, 1723. His son, worn down by the vitriolic public reaction to his part in the witch hunts, survived him by only four and one-half years, dying on February 13, 1728. He was buried with his father in the Copp's Hill Burying Ground not far from the church that they had made so prominent.

Thus ended an unparalleled period in the history of Boston's Second Church.

Chapter Three

A NEST OF TRAITORS

At the head of the long narrow triangle called North Square, formed by the junction of Prince, Sun Court, Garden and Moon Streets — poetic names all — the rebuilt Second Church in Boston stood from 1676 until 1776. Due to its age and location, it became known not only as “The Church of the Mathers” but as “The Old North Church.”

In colonial days the North End surrounding the church was the residence of Boston’s leaders in social, military and religious affairs. When Increase and Cotton Mather walked out of the small wooden parsonage in North Square (on the site of which a successor building would be purchased in 1770 by a silversmith named Paul Revere) they could see dwellings nearby that eventually would house such dignitaries as Sir Harry Frankland and Governor Thomas Hutchinson.

By the closing years of the Mathers’ lives, they were aware that Boston had become the largest town under British government anywhere in America. Yet the ministers could have walked to the farthest parishioner’s address in forty minutes; the community was barely two miles long and three-quarters of a mile wide.

The streets, except in the crowded North End, were broad, regular, and often paved, a unique feature among communities of the colonial period. The Mathers lived to witness Boston’s slow transition from seventeenth-century wooden buildings to eighteenth-century brick structures. Enough wharves jutted out into the harbor, from the bulbous peninsula on which the port was chiefly located, to handle simultaneously many score sailing vessels from the world over. Thirteen churches were erected during Boston’s first century; only seven of these are still alive and active at this writing.

The remarkable longevity of the Second Church, despite its numerous problems, is attributable to its faculty of choosing or receiving superior ministerial leadership at critical points in its history. The passing of Increase Mather and the decease of Cotton Mather within four years of one another could have written an end to the church’s story in the early eighteenth century. Fortunately, productive and even more exciting days lay only fifty

years away.

Within four months after Increase Mather was buried, a young associate joined Cotton Mather. Joshua Gee had been brought up in the Second Church under the direct tutelage of both Mathers. He had graduated from Harvard College in 1717 at the age of seventeen and impressed the clergy and public of that day with his learning, intellect, and argumentative powers.

A dogmatic Calvinist, he engaged furiously in the theological controversies of the day, supporting the most conservative positions. George Whitfield's revivals delighted him. He increased the number of prayer meetings in the church and entered into serious contentions with the majority of the Congregational ministers of the area. He appears, however, to have been indolent by nature, hypnotized by conversation and debate rather than motivated by a crusading zeal to act and build, and this probably prevented him from unloosing his otherwise exceptional abilities.

At the outset of Mr. Gee's ministry, his compensation was about four pounds a week, plus forty pounds a year to defray the cost of firewood, and a liberal allowance for rent. So that he would not be beset by the financial woes that had constantly harried Increase Mather, generous monetary presents from the "church-stock" were handed him whenever necessary.

One year before Cotton Mather's death, Joshua Gee proposed to him that a library for the church be formed under their pastoral care. Dr. Mather headed the list of subscribers, and the library for church members and future pastors was established. This collection of books enjoyed a curious and fertile history. It survived the destruction of the church edifice and the dispersal of the congregation during the American Revolution. In 1821, though many volumes had been lost, there were 123 books in the library of which 63 were of considerable consequence. Exactly one century after Mr. Gee had suggested the library, the incumbent minister of the Second Church, Henry Ware, Jr., proposed that his congregation help build up a library in the new building of the Theological School in Cambridge. Favorably impressed, the Second Church in Boston "voted that the pastor be authorized to select such volumes as he may think proper from its library, and

make a donation of them to the Library of the Theological School, with the proviso that the ministers of the Second Church shall always have free use of the library of the Theological School."

From Cotton Mather's death on February 13, 1728, until the ordination of Samuel Mather as Joshua Gee's colleague on January 28, 1732, the Second Church had but one minister.

Samuel Mather was the fourth child of the second of Cotton Mather's three wives. Though a sensitive and sickly child, he had volunteered to let Dr. Boylston test the smallpox vaccine upon him. When the brave boy nearly died, his father had been jeered in the streets with shouts of "assassin."

Samuel graduated from Harvard College at the age of seventeen, seemingly a traditional Mather Habit, and tutored professionally for a number of years before entering the ministry. Despite this commendable background the congregation split seriously over his candidacy. He was called by only sixty-nine votes out of one hundred and twelve. Perhaps the witch hunt odium still clung to the Mather reputation. More likely, the conservatives had recognized the developing liberalization in the Mather family and were afraid.

Their suspicions were valid. Within nine years Samuel Mather had lost the support of both the reactionary Mr. Gee and of many parishioners on the ground that he was loose in his doctrines and conduct. At the request of the Second Church, which had been unable to arrive at a decision, an ecclesiastical council made up of representatives from other Boston churches considered the charges. Samuel Mather was absolved of the charge of impropriety of conduct which, though we are not told, probably concerned a disregard of those narrowly conceived ministerial duties and observances considered essential in colonial Calvinism. His theological views as expressed in conversations and sermons were found distinctly nonconformist. During a trial period, in which a reconciliation was sought, he could not be false to his own viewpoint. He found it impossible "to be more frequent and distinct in preaching on the nature, and pressing the necessity, of regeneration by the Spirit of grace."

He was no longer acceptable.

Samuel Mather, liberal thinker, noted scholar, bearer of a proud name, was the only pastor ever dismissed from the Second Church in Boston. He departed the parish on December 21, 1741. Lingering doubts and twinges of guilt must have partially prompted the congregation's acceptance of the Ecclesiastical Council's suggestion that he receive a severance pay of one year's salary. Thirty men and 63 women, members of the church, withdrew with him, leaving a membership with Mr. Gee of 80 men and 183 women.



The true Old North Church of Paul Revere's lanterns.

These figures tell us that the total membership of the Second Church in Boston in the mid-eighteenth century was about 356 persons. If this number seems small for a leading Boston church, it must be remembered that under the Calvinist doctrine of the elect the majority of people might, and did, find that they lacked the proper qualifications for admission into membership, although they attended services regularly. The entire concept of church membership differed from that in today's liberal church. In that

period membership was often not granted until the candidate had successfully passed the church's searching inquiry into his doctrinal knowledge, outward blamelessness, spiritual estate and conversion of soul.

The faithful flock of the excluded pastor erected for him a church building, the Tenth Congregational Church in Boston, on the corner of Hanover and North Bennet Streets. Like his forebears, Samuel was a prolific writer, although he did not venture outside the field of theology. Harvard College honored him with the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1771. His deathbed plea, in 1785, that his church disband and rejoin the historic Second Church of his ancestors, was heeded.

His heart had always been with that church, and now he was pleased to see its congregation repudiating the orthodoxy of Joshua Gee. Under John Lathrop, it was becoming one of Boston's more liberal churches. Most of Mather's followers obligingly returned to the parent congregation, bringing it added strength and enthusiasm.

None of Samuel Mather's sons evinced an interest in theology or became a church leader. The remarkable family dynasty of ecclesiastical giants, after one hundred and fifty dynamic years, had finally ceased to reign.

Samuel Checkley, the promising son of an eminent minister of the Old South Church, was ordained on September 3, 1747, as assistant to Joshua Gee. The senior minister had already witnessed the departure of two other associates, Cotton Mather and Samuel Mather. In declining health, the Rev. Mr. Gee passed away one year later in his fifty-first year; he had served his congregation almost twenty-five years. The church still retained a position of leadership in New England ecclesiastical affairs, being sought after for advice and assistance by other churches, and was still held in high regard by the entire city of Boston. The theological position of the church may be judged from the kind of minister the parish expected, and received, when it called Mr. Checkley: "He shall appear to the church to be a person of experimental piety, who embraces the doctrines of grace according to the gospel, and the Confession of Faith of the churches of

New England, and the discipline of the Congregational Churches, exhibited in our well-known platform, and the consociation and communion of churches.”

Mr. Checkley's ministry, despite his unusual skill in conducting the devotional portion of the services, proved weak, and the church sank slowly. Only one of his writings, a funeral sermon, was published, and the records of the church were left so incomplete that we can judge little concerning what occurred during the twenty-one years of his service. In 1760, however, we find the first notation of the congregation as a whole being given the right to participate in the church's government. Perhaps, in view of Mr. Checkley's ineptitude, their help was imperative.

If life was quiet within the Second Church in Boston, it had begun to boil fiercely in the American colonies. Taxation imposed from overseas was at the root of the matter. England had found herself deeply in debt after the Peace of Paris in 1762. Lord Bute decided that the best way to meet the national debt would be to tax the colonies. The people of Massachusetts pleaded in vain that their charter protected their basic liberties, but an inflexible monarch, George III, would brook no compromise. Seven English warships anchored off Nantasket; three regiments of soldiers entered Boston; and another vessel came into Boston to impress some American seamen.

Amidst this excitement a strong, vigorous young man named John Lathrop, only twenty-eight years old, arrived from Connecticut to supply the pulpit for the ailing Samuel Checkley. A few months later, at midnight on March 18, 1768, the anniversary of the repeal of the Stamp Act, with the sound of beating drums and exploding guns in his ears, Mr. Checkley passed away. Both the Second Church in Boston and the American colonies were unknowingly on the threshold of violence, death and a rebirth in freedom and power.

The colonies needed a stirring preacher who could voice with prophetic fire the angry frustrations and patriotic hopes smoldering in thousands of hearts. No one would have believed that the youthful new pastor of the Old North Church would become that man. A week after the British had virtually clamped Boston under

martial law, John Lathrop was asked to preach the "election" sermon to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company that crowded into his church.

"Should the British administration determine fully to execute the laws of which we complain," he cried, "we have yet to fear the calamities of a long civil war. Americans, rather than submit to be hewers of wood and drawers of water for any ministry or nation, would spill their last drop of blood."

Unafraid of the soldiers patrolling the streets outside, he continued: "Those principles which justify rulers in making war on rebellious subjects justify the people in making war on rebellious rulers... War is justifiable when those in Government violate law and attempt to oppress and enslave the people. The fate of America depends on the virtue of her sons."

"The Revolutionary Preacher" was the title bestowed that day upon John Lathrop. Later generations might well have labeled him the Tom Paine of the Revolutionary War clergymen. As an increasing number of patriots began to associate themselves with the minister, and as his outspoken preachments continued, the British accused his church of being "a nest of traitors." It was to pay dearly for this epithet.

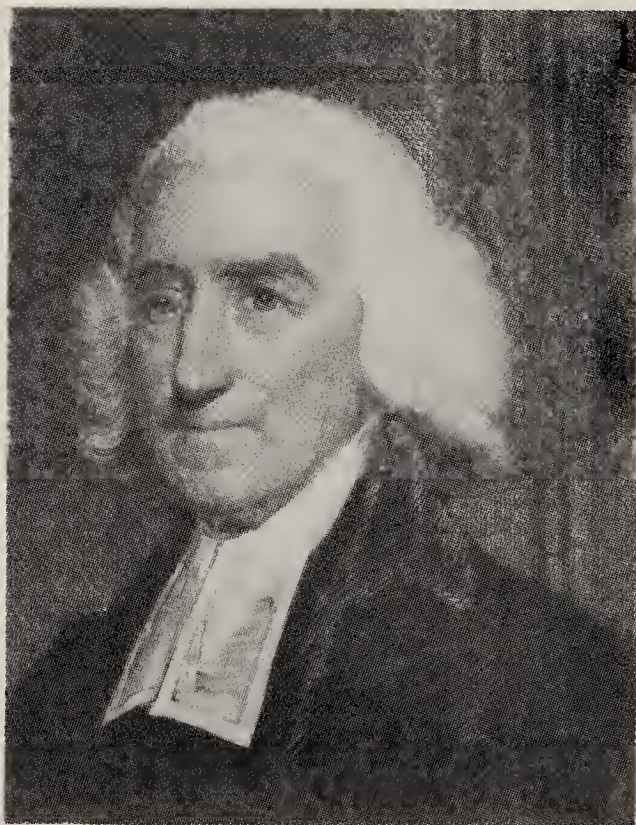
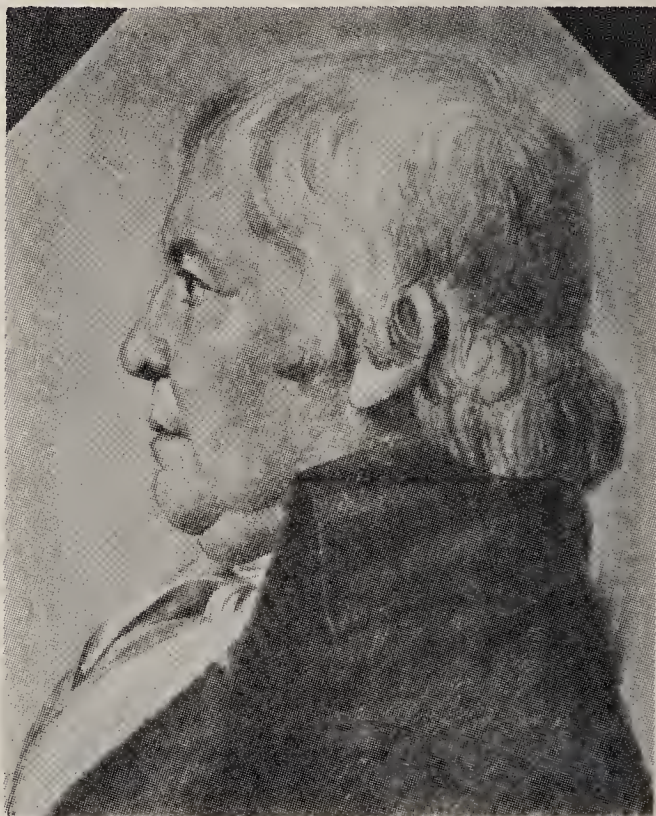
The trials of the Second Church began on March 5, 1770. A parishioner, James Caldwell, was shot to death in the famous Boston Massacre. The problems increased with the printing and distribution of the inflammatory sermons preached by the minister from his historic pulpit. Many Boston families and their pastors felt obliged to move out to remote towns to escape from a war that was unmistakably near. The disintegration of the congregation soon became complete. At last came the crowning disaster.

On December 18, 1775, orders were given by British General Howe that the Old North Church building itself, standing for practically one full century, and now temporarily bereft of pastor and flock, was to be destroyed. The edifice was pulled down by the King's soldiers, on January 16, 1776, according to some records, the only church in Boston to receive this fate.

It was a heartbreaking era for the Second Church in Boston. Yet, since its steeple had almost certainly been used for the

betrayal lanterns of Paul Revere nine months earlier, it could have expected this fate, a time-honored method of avenging signal towers.*

PAUL REVERE
Patriot and Second Church leader



JOHN LATHROP
the "Revolutionary Preacher"

* A full account of the author's research in connection with the steeple lanterns incident is given in Appendix A of this volume.

Chapter Four

GOOD-BY, CALVINISM! HELLO, UNITARIANISM!

General George Washington marched back into Boston soon after the British had evacuated the city on March 17, 1776. The joy of the Second Church parishioners at being able to return safely to their homes was mitigated by the discovery that their meeting house had been destroyed. Dr. Ebenezer Pemberton, invalid pastor of the enormous New Brick Church on Hanover Street, not far from North Square, who had been serving his North End church for more than twenty years and, before that, the First Presbyterian Church in New York City, for twenty-two years, invited John Lathrop and his congregation to hold joint worship services with his own group. Due to Dr. Pemberton's aged and almost helpless condition, the leadership of the parish soon devolved upon John Lathrop's capable shoulders beginning with the first joint service on March 31, 1776.

On May 6, 1779, the congregations of the Second Church in Boston and the New Brick Church, both thinned considerably by losses during the war, voted to merge. They incorporated under the name of "Old North, the Second Church in Boston," with the popular John Lathrop continuing as their pastor. Thus were solved the problems of the leaderless, impoverished New Brick Church congregation and of the strongly lead but homeless Second Churchmen. Death claimed Dr. Pemberton just four months later.

Actually the congregation of the Second Church in Boston, in moving into the New Brick Church building, was simply drawing unto itself the building and worshipers of its own grandchild church. In 1714, the Second Church had grown so large and affluent that some of its members withdrew and established the "New North Church" on Hanover and Clark Streets. The nickname "Old North Church" was used by many people thereafter for the Second Church to distinguish it from its offspring. Other persons continued to refer to the North Square institution as the "North Church". To place the Second Church's blessing upon this new congregation, both Increase Mather and Cotton Mather had assisted in the ordination of the New North Church's first pastor, John Webb.

Only five years later discord had arisen over the choice of the

minister, Peter Thacher, who was proposed as Mr. Webb's colleague in the New North Church. The controversy became so violent that the group opposed to Mr. Thacher withdrew from the church and proceeded to erect its own edifice on the east side of Hanover Street between Richmond and Prince Streets. It was dedicated on May 10, 1721, with Increase Mather giving a prayer and Cotton Mather the sermon. William Waldron, the first minister of the church, was the last man to receive ordination from Dr. Increase Mather, then in his eighty-third year. The New Brick Church, as it was called, was to stand for the next 123 years and realize post-Revolutionary eminence under the ministries of John Lathrop, Henry Ware, Jr., Ralph Waldo Emerson and Chandler Robbins. Such was the magnificence of the building for those early eighteenth-century days that Cotton Mather's dedicatory sermon included this description: "There is not in all the land a more beautiful house built for the worship of God than this."

After only fifty-eight years of independent existence under four ministers it officially became the Second Church in Boston, bringing together again congregations that previously had been one. Three famous nicknames long adhered to the church: the "New Brick Church" (because of its construction), the "Old North Church" or "North Church" (as the successor, after 1779, of the original "Old North"), and the "Cockerel Church" (because of the magnificent cockerel weathervane atop its lofty steeple).

Members of the congregation had contributed old brass kettles to Shem Drowne, the noted maker of weathervanes, so that he could fashion for the steeple a beautiful golden cockerel with elegant golden plumage. Five feet, four inches high and weighing 172 pounds, this jaunty bird faced the winds of Boston during the considerable lifetime of this edifice. When the "New Brick" was finally taken down the weathervane was sold to the First Church in Cambridge (Congregational). The 238-year-old bird crows tirelessly against the Cambridge sky to this day. A replica of this cockerel is perched on top of the present Second Church tower on Beacon Street.

The original bell of the New Brick Church was discarded after

the union of the two congregations and the larger bell of the Old North Church was hung in its place. In 1792 the bell cracked but was skillfully recast by one of the church's most devoted laymen, Paul Revere, who inscribed on it: "THE FIRST BELL CAST IN BOSTON, 1792, by P. REVERE." (In 1901 the Second Church, incorrectly judging that it would never need the bell again, disposed of it to St. James Episcopal Church in Cambridge where it can now be seen).

The New Brick Church, third sanctuary in the history of the Second Church in Boston, had been painted for the first time in 1743. The structure was so large that porch entrances were placed in the south, east and west walls. Open grounds surrounded it on all sides.



Model of the New Brick Church;
Emerson's own church

of the Rev. Ralph Waldo Emerson could be clearly heard when he was preaching in later years.

The New Brick Church had begun life in an exceedingly liberal manner. The creed attached to the covenant said simply: "We declare our serious belief in the Christian religion, as contained

The pulpit was centrally placed on the north side, facing two enclosures — one for the elders and one for the deacons. Long benches for the aged were placed alongside the aisles in front of the square box pews. There were two levels of galleries on the west side, a women's gallery on the east and a men's gallery on the south. The uppermost gallery was the favorite haunt of little boys, as the adults seldom needed it to sit in. Apparently the building was acoustically excellent. Even the soft voice

in the Sacred Scriptures.” The doctrine of the Trinity was implied in the phraseology of the several obligations laid upon the members. The brief covenant demanded a promise to live a life of obedience to Christ, to love and watch over one another, to keep all the ordinances of the gospel, and to bring religious education to one’s children.

The congregation had become sufficiently emancipated from orthodoxy by 1729 to permit the scriptures to be read in public services. This was a bold innovation for the period. The preachers still adhered to a schedule of two sermons and four lengthy prayers each Sunday.

When the nearby Baptist group under Dr. Stillman was without a house of worship from June until December, 1771, it had been hospitably taken in by the New Brick Church. The two congregations worshiped together, and their pastors took turns conducting the services. This display of brotherhood augured well for the success of the 1779 merger with the Second Church itself.

The ministry of John Lathrop, spanning nearly forty-eight years, covered the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. It saw the establishment of the United States of America and the beginnings of the golden age of New England literature. In 1784 friends purchased for him a Doctor of Divinity degree from the University of Edinburgh. At that time this was not an uncommon way of showing esteem for honored clergymen. He served as a member of the Harvard College corporation for nearly forty years. Countless charitable and literary organizations in Massachusetts owed much to his leadership in their affairs.

Not a homiletic or scholarly giant, he still possessed rare wisdom and judgment, coupled with gifts of kindness and persuasion, that caused his church to grow once more into one of the most powerful and flourishing in Boston. A man of serene dignity and almost apostolic appearance, his name became a household word in the North End.

The freedom-loving preacher who had courageously challenged political and economic tyranny during the American Revolution was an equally pioneering thinker in the theological revolution gathering strength in New England. At the start of his ministry

he thoroughly believed in the Calvinist doctrines of the Second Church, not realizing that his notions of human freedom and equal rights for all men ran counter to the implications of the Calvinist dogma of original sin. The division of men into the elect and the damned in a world governed by a harsh, almost unrelenting, deity, did not at first offend his sense of justice.

He met and talked with the Rev. William Hazlitt, an English Unitarian minister then residing in Boston. His thinking began to change after reading tracts and books by the Reverend Joseph Priestley, the English Unitarian clergyman and scientist who had discovered oxygen and had been driven from his homeland as a religious heretic. Many conversations with the liberal James Freeman, minister of King's Chapel, disclosed that both men were rapidly giving up their beliefs in the Trinity, the deity of Jesus and the Apostles' Creed, as unscriptural, erroneous and detracting from the true message of pure Christianity. Dr. Lathrop knew that John Quincy Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and other contemporaries of his had espoused the Unitarian theological position and that an increasing number of Calvinist ministers were slowly moving toward it.

These heretical and explosive ideas were bound to rock New England, especially such institutions as the Second Church in Boston. So persuasive and kindly was Dr. Lathrop's presentation of his revised views that gradually he carried his entire congregation with him into Unitarianism. By 1802, it had fully cast off Calvinism for Unitarianism, and in 1825, the church was to figure prominently and proudly in the establishment of the new liberal denomination in America. Increase and Cotton Mather would have proclaimed this a victory for the Devil could they have known what happened to their beloved Puritan church!

In the closing years of Dr. John Lathrop's life the population of Boston was still scarcely twenty-five thousand. The town had not yet developed the social and intellectual climate for which it would later become noted. A visitor remarked on the community's resemblance to an old English market town. Sidewalks and streets were paved with cobblestones. A few oil lamps provided the only illumination at night. Parishioners of the Second Church

— like the wealthy Paul Revere, who owned a successful silversmith shop and copper foundry, and Edmund Hartt, designer and builder of the frigate *Constitution* — wore colored coats, figured waistcoats, knee-breeches and long, white-topped boots.

It was a sad day for all Boston on January 4, 1816, when the venerable Dr. John Lathrop passed away. His remains were placed with many honors in the Old Granary Burying Ground. Paul Revere, who had prized deeply his longtime membership in the Old North Church and had served it faithfully as a trustee, was buried from its edifice just two years later.

Chapter Five

WARE AND EMERSON

After nearly a year of searching, an exceptional twenty-three-year-old Hingham boy named Henry Ware, Jr., was ordained on January 1, 1817, as John Lathrop's successor. Under this indefatigable worker and excellent pulpit speaker the congregation swelled, attracting numerous Boston leaders into the church.

The young clergyman paralleled the sermonic emphases of his friend William Ellery Channing of the Federal Street Church: the dignity of man and his sonship to God imply a definite moral responsibility for the welfare of even the poorest among us; religion should express itself in practical humanitarian activities to lift up the less fortunate. Inspired by the minister, the Old North Church and its laymen became known as a fountain-head for benevolent enterprises.

Projects included establishing a Sunday school for underprivileged children, organizing clubs for workingmen, arranging series of public lectures and making house-to-house visits to the sick and unemployed. Ware was too busy with his varied parish activities to take the direct leadership of these charitable activities, and so a layman, Joseph Tuckerman, was brought in from Chelsea to supervise them. From this small beginning, it may be said, began the concept of the Associated Charities system that is now found in almost every American city. The Benevolent Fraternity of Unitarian Churches still carries on this type of work in Boston and has included at least two ministers of the Second Church among its presidents.

Imbued with a genuinely progressive spirit, Henry Ware, Jr. flouted the then popular prejudice against the use of organs in church worship by installing one on November 2, 1822 — a daring innovation subject to outraged criticism. The Second Church was also one of the first ecclesiastical institutions in Boston to organize its own Sunday school for children. On June 22, 1823, the Rev. Mr. Ware received the first children into formal classes of instruction to be held each Sunday thereafter.

Through his writings Mr. Ware did much to advance the cause of education, peace and Unitarian theology. His tract called *Discourse on Temperance* enjoyed a major sale in this country

and was in much demand in England.

A number of those Boston clergymen who were Unitarian in their thinking concluded regretfully that at last a formal break



HENRY WARE, Jr.

Co-founder of Unitarian denomination thereafter Mr. Ware labored in the new movement serving as its part-time Foreign Secretary or as a member of its Executive Committee. From this small beginning developed the great, continent-wide Unitarian denomination of today that is about to merge with the Universalists.

Under the pressure of his many ecclesiastical responsibilities, the minister's health began to decline. In the twelfth year of his ministry, on a Sunday in December 1828, he tendered his resignation. The church declined to accept it and persuaded him to remain by securing an energetic colleague to lift from his shoulders many burdens of parish care. On March 11, 1829, the associate minister was ordained. His name was Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Hoping to regain his shattered health, the senior minister of the Second Church traveled throughout Europe from the spring of 1829 until the summer of 1830. The unusual quality of his work as a preacher, writer, and worker had so impressed itself upon Harvard College, that he was offered an appointment to the newly-created position of Hollis Professor of Pulpit Eloquence and Pastoral Care. Perhaps thinking that his frail constitution might

must be made from the established denominations. These men were under constant harassment by their orthodox brethren for their repudiation of Trinitarianism, and their claim that each individual has the right to freedom in religious thinking. Henry Ware, Jr., joined William Ellery Channing and a number of other clergymen on May 25, 1825, to found a new denomination, the American Unitarian Association. For eleven years

stand up better under a professor's regime than in the ministry, he resigned his pulpit on October 3, 1830.

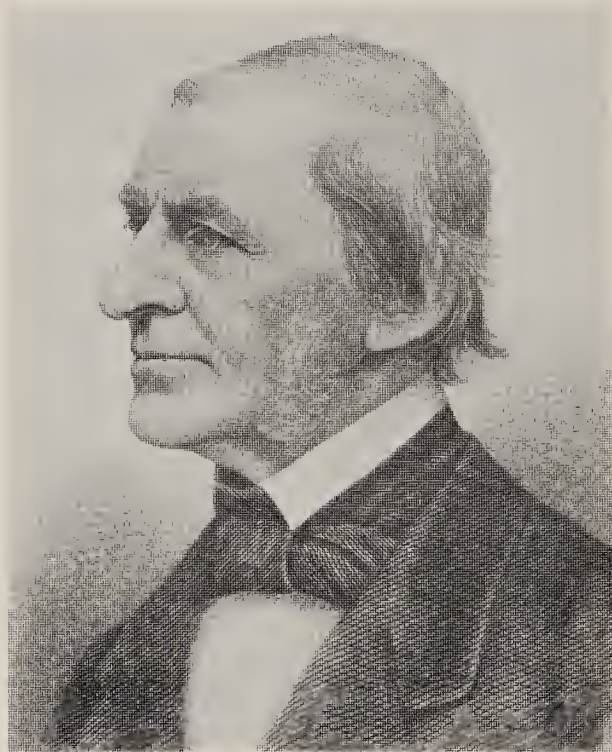
Four more Unitarian-minded professors were appointed to Harvard in the following two years, transforming that institution into the foremost center of intellectual and religious liberalism in the country. This challenge to orthodox domination created a memorable storm. Orthodoxy in America exploded into action. The Andover Theological School was founded to counteract the new Unitarianism. Lyman Beecher was installed in Boston's Park Street Church to combat it. Years later Dr. Beecher wrote in retrospective annoyance: "All the literary men of Massachusetts were Unitarian; all the trustees and professors of Harvard College were Unitarian; all the elite of wealth and fashion crowded Unitarian churches; the judges on the bench were Unitarian, giving decisions by which the peculiar features of church organization so carefully ordered by the Pilgrim fathers had been nullified, and all the power had passed into the hands of the congregation."

Unitarianism was, indeed, well launched in this country. To Henry Ware, Jr., at least, the cost was great. Through a period of controversy and declining health, he carried on his Harvard professorship for twelve years, only to die at the age of forty-nine on September 22, 1843. In his memory a distinguished authority in some intellectual discipline is selected to deliver each year the "Ware Lecture" to the official nationwide May Meetings of the American Unitarian Association.

Nine out of the eighty-three persons voting were opposed to calling Ralph Waldo Emerson to the Second Church pulpit. Perhaps his unorthodox views intimidated some members of a congregation that was beginning to retreat from the new liberalism. This scion of eight generations of Puritan clergymen was the son of William Emerson, the late pastor of the First Church in Boston, who had been known as one of the city's most liberal preachers. But the erudition and gentleness of the tall, thin young minister finally triumphed.

Ralph Waldo Emerson's monumental contributions to liberal thought were to pour forth not during his service in this pulpit

but in the fifty years afterward. Listeners of the time state that his manner of preaching was solemn and the content of his thought



RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Ninth pastor, famed writer

candidly and clearly expressed. His treatment of subjects reflected the essay technique of which he later became a world-famed master. Among his other community services, he was chaplain of the Massachusetts State Senate and a member of the Boston School Committee.

Emerson feared that religion would strangle itself in lifeless formality, creeds, ritual and ceremonial. Not overly impressed by tradition, he suggested that each man create his own Bible, writing into it verses from the poet of this

culture, a chapter from the sages of that race, a sentence from the wisdom of another age, thus producing a book of spiritual resources that might "thrill him like the sound of a trumpet." The message fell on deaf ears. The once revolutionary Second Church in Boston was on the threshold of exactly a century and a quarter of the most conservative theology and ritualistic formalism to be found in any American Unitarian Church.

After a ministry of only three-and-one-half years, Emerson advised a group of church members whom he had summoned to his home that he could no longer administer the "Lord's Supper," or Communion, in the traditional form. It should be a spiritual and not a material observance. Hence he proposed that the bread and wine be removed and that Communion become a simple commemorative gathering. The congregation studied the proposal and rejected it while earnestly hoping that the minister would find it possible to continue as in the past. Shortly afterward, the twenty-nine-year-old Mr. Emerson preached a sermon fully explaining his unalterable position relative to the sacrament and his own

conscience. Under the circumstances, he stated in his sermon, he had no recourse but to tender his resignation. It took effect on October 28, 1832. The entire controversy was carried on in a most gentle and noble spirit on both sides. The parting was genuinely sad and affectionate. "I had hoped to carry them with me, but I failed," he said quietly in later years.

Formalism had triumphed temporarily over freedom.

Although Ralph Waldo Emerson never accepted a call to another church, he nostalgically could not resist invitations to occupy various Unitarian pulpits for years after. In 1860 he preached several times for the enormous Music Hall congregation left leaderless by the death of Theodore Parker, one of the great Unitarian orators of all time. But writing and lecturing claimed most of his time — the pulpit's loss was the world's gain. Free of time-consuming pastoral responsibilities, he gained the opportunity to compose the poems and essays that earned him fame as the foremost man of letters in American history.

Only six years after his resignation as the ninth minister of the Old North Church on Hanover Street, Emerson — his mind still creating revolutionary innovations in the realm of religious philosophy—delivered an address before the graduating class of the Harvard Divinity School. It shattered the somnolent complacency of the New England churches and became one of the three most important sermons in American Unitarian annals. No New World theologian had so frankly challenged the traditional attitudes toward God, Jesus, Christianity, and the function of the church. Some of the Unitarian professors in the school shuddered.

It made a searing impression on Theodore Parker, who was sitting in the little audience: "It was the most inspiring strain I ever listened to, so beautiful, so just, so true, and terribly sublime! My soul aroused and this week I shall write the long-meditated sermons on the state of the church and the duties of these times." This man, Parker, whose sermons were eagerly sought by Abraham Lincoln, and whose congregations reached three thousand persons, was to preach in 1841 a third epoch-making Unitarian address. He too was years ahead of his time in challenging popular orthodox theological ideas.

The dramatic upheaval within Unitarianism caused by these searching addresses was to affect the denomination for decades. Though the unity of the movement was temporarily weakened, the ultimate result for all was a new freedom from narrow, outworn concepts. The churches of New England, though divided in their reception, tended to remain clear of the newer thinking of Emerson and Parker while the rest of the country generally embraced it with cautious, though marked, concern. The Second Church in Boston joined the reactionary wing under the aegis of its next minister, Chandler Robbins.

Chapter Six

IN FIVE BUILDINGS

After searching thirteen months for a gifted pastor, the Second Church accepted the suggestion of Professor Henry Ware, Jr., that one of his brightest former students in the Harvard Divinity School be called. On December 3, 1833, twenty-three-year-old Chandler Robbins was ordained. His ministry was to last forty-one years, and to lead the congregation across Boston, where they were to occupy five different church edifices and four temporary places of worship. A strange odyssey lay ahead for the North End church that had occupied only three buildings in the previous two centuries.

In the early nineteenth century the character of the North End began to change. Many old families long associated with the Second Church in Boston shared in the population movement southward. In 1832 Emerson had noted that half his parishioners now dwelled in the southerly areas and that many non-Protestant families were moving in around the church. The Roman Catholic hierarchy offered nineteen thousand dollars for the ancient house of worship. The congregation bravely, if unwisely, declined. It spent three thousand dollars to patch the building and prolong its life.

The city finally condemned the 123-year-old structure in 1844. In the ensuing debate over whether to rebuild in a more southerly location, where the more substantial families and majority of parishioners now resided, or to construct a new edifice on the same site despite the increasing undesirability of the location, Chandler Robbins sided with the "stay put" minority. It was decided to build a new church on the same Hanover Street lot.

Many a tearful eye watched as the venerable brick edifice was being demolished. The pulpit, sixty-four pews and the chandelier were purchased by the Unitarian Church in Billerica. The organ went to the Unitarian Society in Danvers. The famed golden cockerel weathervane and Paul Revere bell came to rest, some years later, in Cambridge churches of Congregational and Episcopalian background. A small model of the church was constructed from bits of its original wood and presented to Chandler Robbins. (It may be seen, inside a glass display case, in the Mather Room

of the present Beacon Street building).

During the one-year interval, while the new brownstone building was going up, the congregation worshiped by invitation in the sanctuary of the Old South Church. In grateful recognition of this hospitality, one of the original silver cups belonging to the communion plate of the Second Church in Boston was presented to the host congregation. It was inscribed:

*The Old South Church
In Memory Of Her
Christian Hospitality
To The
Second Church
1844*

In 1845, the Second Church in Boston reassembled in its ornate new Gothic building, at first in joy, then in dismay. The cost of the edifice had exceeded all estimates. Many parishioners who had opposed the location withdrew, and only a handful of people, burdened with debt, remained. The congregation felt a moral responsibility to succeed and uphold the rich name of the historic Old North Church. A certain shame drove them on, for it was clear that they had exercised poor judgment in the site they had chosen and the building they had erected. Good intentions proved unequal to the size of their task. They finally sold their beautiful church only four years after it was finished. The Methodist purchasers worshiped there until the widening of Hanover Street in 1869 forced its demolition.

During this Hanover Street period, Chandler Robbins had served as chaplain of the Massachusetts Senate (1834), as chaplain of the Massachusetts House of Representatives (1835), and as editor of the *Christian Register*, official journal of the Unitarian movement in America, from January 1837 to April 1839.

The frequent shifts from one location to another, that were to characterize the next stage in the Second Church's history under his leadership, resulted partially from a lack of foresight in anticipating the direction of population changes. Mammoth altera-

tions, caused by the explosive growth of Boston, were taking place in the city. Today's great metropolis was being molded. People were seeking new residential areas and breaking up older ones. Many churches experienced difficult times as their geographical surroundings were gradually emptied of parishioners.

Thus, in 1849, the congregation became churchless. Public worship was maintained unbroken in the hall of the Masonic Temple until the spring of 1850, when a welcome offer was received from the deacons of the Freeman Place Chapel. The distinguished Unitarian pastor of that parish, James Freeman Clarke, had long been in such ill health that the church was scarcely functioning. The Second Church in Boston purchased the chapel on Beacon Hill, installed Chandler Robbins as minister and worshiped there during the next four years.

In 1843, while the divided Second Church congregation had been reconstructing its ill-fated church on Hanover Street, a new religious society called the Church of the Savior had built itself a notable church on Bedford Street. Under the leadership of the Rev. Henry Waterson, this new society had engaged Hammat Billings to design an edifice of pure gothic architecture. It turned out to be the most beautiful ecclesiastical structure in Boston. Unfortunately, the churchmen were duplicating the mistake of the Old North Church in contracting for a sanctuary beyond the means of their small congregation.

Increased strength and diminished debts seemed possible through a merger of the congregations and assets of the Second Church in Boston and the Church of the Savior. The two churches became one in 1854 continuing under the original corporate name of the elder one, the Second Church in Boston. Its historic records, library, communion plate and other valued possessions were retained. The Second Church was repeating an earlier episode in which it had moved into the New Brick building in 1776, with its own minister, John Lathrop, taking over. In transferring to the lovely Church of the Savior building, the elder congregation's Chandler Robbins became pastor. Dr. Waterson, like Dr. Pemberton almost four score years earlier, went into retirement. This union produced a long period of self-centered activity and conventional

prosperity. The Second Church in Boston settled down and developed a staid congregation which attracted many of the city's elite.

America moved into the throes of the Civil War. The slavery issue drove to the heart of the country's moral character. Mass immigration from Europe was producing new problems of minorities and prejudice, housing and urban change. Fabulous inventions and the new industrial age were shaking up the old society.

On these great issues and epochal events the pulpit of the Old North Church was strangely silent. Chandler Robbins rejected the prophetic ministry of the Mathers and Ware; scorned the bold Unitarianism of contemporaries like Channing, Emerson, and Parker; and remained largely aloof from the social issues boiling around him. It was a quiescent period for the Second Church in Boston, echoing the pastorates of Joshua Gee and Samuel Checkley. Unfortunately it was impressing a stamp of social and theological conservatism upon the character of the church that would endure deep into the twentieth century.

One parishioner, Frederick Walker Lincoln, threw a redeeming light over this priestly period. The grandson of Paul Revere, he was twice elected mayor of Boston, serving with distinction through the Civil War. In his civic influence he can be listed beside William Ellery Channing, Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison. Few philanthropic or charitable institutions failed to receive his guidance. He was instrumental in founding the Young Men's Christian Union, building the City Hall, and bringing into existence the fine Bay Bay residential area.

New England was at the height of its most notable literary period. Giants strode the Boston landscape: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, William Cullen Bryant, Oliver Wendell Holmes, John Greenleaf Whittier, James Russell Lowell, Louisa May Alcott, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Curiously enough, each of these contributors to the golden age of American literature was a Unitarian.

Gifted with the pen, Chandler Robbins wrote hymns that found their way into the hymnals of various Christian faiths and articles that were published by several national magazines. In 1855,

Harvard honored him with a Doctor of Divinity degree. He was a conservative without being dogmatic, a man of cultivated mind, a classical scholar who concentrated his attentions upon his own learning and his congregation, giving little heed to the problems of his community and the world outside. He often said that his aim was "to preach Christ and Him crucified." His religious views were of the most conservative order.

He isolated himself and his congregation from close affiliation with the Unitarian denomination and from sharing in the direction or responsibilities of its religious work. This further closed the doors of fellowship with the great liberal waves of his own era. His detailed, 320-page book, published by a committee of the church in 1852, *A History of the Second Church, or Old North, in Boston*, studiously avoids reference to Unitarianism in general or to the Unitarian thinking of his pulpit predecessors.

Although fundamentally conservative by nature, Dr. Chandler Robbins, like other New England Unitarian clergymen of the time, seems to have been reacting against what he regarded as a sacrilegious theological radicalism sweeping the denomination. He felt a marked distaste for the widely-published 1819 Baltimore sermon of Channing, the 1838 Harvard Divinity School address of Emerson, and the 1841 South Boston address of Parker. He knew and liked the men personally but not their revolutionary thinking. These three historic addresses clarified the Unitarian position on the errors of the Trinity, the humanity of Jesus, the moral enormity of the atonement, the discovery of truth through experience and not via authority or the supernatural, and the theological misuse of alleged miracles. In reaction against the outspoken Theodore Parker, who was influencing thousands weekly in his huge congregations, numerous local Unitarian clergymen like Chandler Robbins tried to appease and attract the orthodox. New England Unitarianism, in consequence, became markedly conservative while the rest of the country ironically flew ahead upon the theological wings of Boston's own Channing, Emerson and Parker.

Apparently the congregation of the Church of the Saviour brought with it a liturgical worship service. Records indicate that in 1854, the year of the merger, Dr. Robbins introduced, in place of

the simple Unitarian-Congregational order of worship, a liturgical service that was to be changed and developed by succeeding ministers. It became increasingly Episcopalian in form and content as the years passed. Could they have known, the Mathers would have arisen from their graves in righteous wrath. The Puritan worshipers in Boston had abhorred all semblance of Church of England rites. Ralph Waldo Emerson looked on with gentle disapproval: his former church was transgressing further and further from his ideal of a purely spiritual and unadorned service.

A visitor to Bedford Street, today, knows that it is lined with stores, office buildings and warehouses. The inroads of business and the egress of parishioners prompted the society in 1872 to sell its valuable church property there and purchase a lot at Huntington Avenue and West Newton Street. But the Boston fire of November 9, 1872, caused a change of site to Boylston Street in busy Copley Square. We cannot help questioning once again the judgment of the peripatetic parson and his parishioners in their new choice. They were moving almost next door to two flourishing Unitarian churches, the First Church in Boston and the Arlington Street Church, not to mention the Church of the Unity and the South Congregational Church, both Unitarian, a little farther away.

In 1872, the beautiful Bedford Street Church was carefully taken down, the materials marked with numbers and all parts put in storage. In due time everything was transported to Copley Square — the stones for the walls, the pews and pulpit, the stained glass windows and organ. The church was reassembled in somewhat different arrangement while retaining the former style of architecture.

The interior of the restored building was in the shape of a Greek cross. Although finished in black walnut, it was not dark or gloomy. Over five hundred persons could be seated in the main floor and gallery pews. In addition to a small chapel off the main sanctuary, there were meeting rooms, a kitchen, and a fine parlor located in the church basement.

During the interval of construction, the congregation accepted

an invitation from King's Chapel, a church in its own conservative tradition, to worship in its sanctuary. The following season the members met in the Children's Mission Hall until the new Copley Square edifice was ready. It was dedicated on September 17, 1874.



The Second Church: in Copley Square 1874 to 1912

Old age and encroaching blindness prompted the kindly Dr. Chandler Robbins to resign his pastorate of forty-one years on December 4, 1874. He had led his band of worshipers in five different church buildings, beginning as a youth in the North End with the famed old New Brick Church and ending in the evening of his life at a centrally-located church in Copley Square in downtown Boston. We are grateful that, despite errors of judgment, he had displayed the courage to move his church and keep it alive when other congregations had remained stationary and died. Just eight years later both Chandler Robbins and his predecessor, Ralph Waldo Emerson, passed away. They expired just

a few months and miles apart. But their minds, up to the end, were still separated by an incalculable distance.

Chapter Seven

IN COPLEY SQUARE

Excited by the fresh opportunities of the Copley Square location, the congregation eagerly called to its pulpit a man serving a church across the seas in England. Robert Laird Collier was born in Maryland and had begun his ministerial career as a Methodist clergyman. Finding his theological views closer to Unitarianism, he changed denominations and enjoyed a fruitful pastorate in the Church of the Messiah (now The First Unitarian Church) in Chicago. Poor health prompted his resignation. He sailed to England and there accepted the leadership of a Unitarian church in Leicester. From that parish he was called to the Second Church.

The theological conservatism typical of the time is exemplified in two sentences in the call extended by the Standing Committee to Dr. Collier: "We profess to be a church of Christ, believing him to be our Master upon earth, and rejoicing in the hope of a glorious immortality through the message which he brought from our Father in heaven. Your religious culture, piety, and sound theological opinions founded on the Holy Scriptures seem eminently to fit you at the present time for the wants and responsibilities of a Boston pulpit."

On Wednesday evening, March 15, 1876, Robert Laird Collier was installed as the eleventh minister of the Second Church in Boston, and the first pastor to serve in its seventh building. Notable names in Unitarianism were among the speakers helping to celebrate the milestone: Edward Everett Hale, James Freeman Clarke, Robert Collyer and Henry Wilder Foote.

Attacking his responsibilities vigorously, Dr. Collier succeeded in clearing the new edifice of nearly all its fifty thousand dollars indebtedness to building contractors. He was dissatisfied with the service and hymn book written for the church in 1854 by his predecessor, Chandler Robbins. Securing a copy of the famed *Book of Worship* compiled by two of Great Britain's most illustrious Unitarian leaders, Dr. Martineau and Dr. Sandler, he revised and adapted its ritual and sacraments to the needs of the Boston congregation. The influence of the Episcopalian *Book of Common Prayer* was evident throughout, although the theology was not

Trinitarian. This work, together with a short collection of hymns, was published by the church and served it for the next forty years.

Ill health again assailed this dynamic clergyman, forcing his resignation in August 1879, after a ministry as short as Ralph Waldo Emerson's. Eleven years later he died in Maryland, the interval having been spent in England and, for three years, in Kansas City, where he served the Unitarian Church as minister.

The Second Church reached only a few miles, into Hingham, to find its next pastor. Under Edward Augustus Horton, who was installed on May 24, 1880, the church grew strong, attracting numerous distinguished Bostonians into its pews. Among his parishioners were governors of Massachusetts like Oliver Ames, John D. Long and Thomas Talbot. Occupying neighboring pulpits were such giants as Phillips Brooks and Edward Everett Hale. It was a golden age for churches in the Copley Square district.

Dr. Horton had gone into the ministry after seeing considerable action as a sailor during the Civil War. He had fought aboard the Union warship *Seneca* and taken part in the assaults on Fort Sumter. Before reaching the Second Church he had obtained degrees from the University of Chicago and the Meadville Theological School and had studied at Brunswick and Heidelberg in Germany. A slender, graceful gentleman with long, flowing hair, Dr. Horton was sometimes mistaken for the noted actor, Sir Henry Irving.

On December 26, 1889, the beautiful organ was dedicated which still serves the Second Church in the twentieth century. It was given in memory of Florence Adams Sawyer by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Sylvanus A. Denio, at the suggestion of Dr. Horton. It seems difficult to imagine that only sixty-seven years earlier, on November 2, 1822, popular prejudice in the Second Church against such instruments, which were scorned as "boxes of whistles", had diminished enough so that the first organ could be installed. Even then, very few of the twenty-eight churches in Boston had taken so bold a step forward. This church had come a long way from the days when its founding fathers had brought to this land only five tunes that they felt were suitable to be used in the worship of God.

Dr. Horton resigned his pastorate on February 1, 1892, seeking to regain his health by a change of occupation. The Second Church continued to bask in the reflected glory of its minister emeritus' additional contributions to Boston's civic and religious environment. For many years thereafter he served as director and president of the national Unitarian Sunday School Union, and as executive secretary and president of the Benovolent Fraternity of Unitarian Churches which was engaged in social service work throughout Boston. Like his predecessors, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Chandler Robbins, he was chosen chaplain of the Massachusetts Senate, the oldest continuous legislative body in the United States. He proved so able that he served the unprecedented number of twenty-five years, finally retiring at his own request in 1929. The Senate then unanimously elected him the only chaplain-emeritus in its long history.

So busy was Edward Augustus Horton that at one point while working in his office at the American Unitarian Association, he controlled the extension of churches, the settlement of clergy in their parishes and the production of educational materials for the young. He would not recognize the complicated headquarters organization of today! Dr. Horton developed Sunday school courses, prepared the *Book of Song and Service* used nationally for many years, authored numerous hymns and poems, and wrote more than fifteen books. Despite these labors, he lived into his eighty-eighth year, dying in Toronto, Canada, on April 15, 1931.

At the time of Dr. Horton's departure from the Second Church, a suggestion was received from the Church of the Unity on Newton Street, led by Dr. Minot Judson Savage, that the two institutions merge into a single church in Copley Square. Since the combined total of the congregations each Sunday reached nearly fifteen hundred persons — a number the Copley Square Church could not accommodate — and no desire developed to build a huge new edifice, the plan disintegrated.

On Tuesday evening, April 4, 1893, the Second Church installed a handsome young man whom it had called directly from a notable ten-year ministry on the Pacific coast. Thomas Van Ness was born in Boston and graduated from the Harvard Divinity School.

He established an excellent reputation in the Second Church as a preacher, lecturer, writer and organizer. But it was his misfortune, as the twentieth century approached, to find population movements and the inroads of business causing a visible shrinkage of his following.

The two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the church was observed on November 19 and 20, 1899, with three brilliant services of worship. Addresses were delivered by Roger Wolcott, the Governor of Massachusetts; Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard University; Francis G. Peabody, distinguished Harvard professor; and Edward Everett Hale, grand old man of the American liberal pulpit.

Three superb memorials were unveiled. On the upper wall behind the pulpit was placed a stately, life-sized mosaic figure of Truth in the graceful drapery and cowl of the Byzantine period with a golden key of knowledge suspended from the neck, the sword of truth in the right hand and a burning torch to illuminate the world in the left hand. Over this art masterpiece by the Tiffany Studios of New York City was inscribed: *Know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*

Tall, slender windows of stained glass were introduced on either side of the chancel. The left side picture represented courage and charity — in the figures of St. Martin, a Roman warrior, cutting his mantle in two to share it with a poor boy, and of the apostle Paul's friend, Dorcas, taking two fair-haired children under her protection. The opposite window, illuminated with equal richness, depicted the memorable protest of Dr. Increase Mather, before the British commissioners in London over the surrender of the colony's charter.

The third memorial, presented by the young people of the congregation, was a handsome marble bust of Ralph Waldo Emerson. These distinguished memorials were transferred into the next edifice of the congregation, in 1914, where they can be seen to-day. The anniversary occasion was honored by publishing, in a well-bound and illustrated 206-page volume, all the addresses given during the week's activities.

For three years, beginning in 1909, meetings were quietly held

with trustees of Edward Everett Hale's former church, South Congregational (Unitarian), located at Newbury and Exeter Streets, looking toward a possible merger. By then both groups faced dwindling congregations. They decided to retain the historic name, Second Church in Boston, but neither group would agree to give up its own minister. Negotiations reached a stalemate that was never resolved.

Finally in March 1912, the Standing Committee of the Second Church decided to accept an offer of \$475,000 from private business interests for its Copley Square property. Too many liberal churches clustered in an increasingly mercantile area. The congregation was forced to this decisive action if it was to survive.

With the money now at its disposal, it could consider three plans for the future. The congregation could amalgamate with the South Congregational Church and erect a magnificent new edifice not unlike the Mother Church of the First Church of Christ Scientist. It could construct a large office building, similar to Tremont Temple, that would contain the sanctuary, several meeting rooms and rentable office space. Or it could move the entire Copley Square structure out into a prosperous center such as Kenmore Square.

In order not to stand in the way of whatever plan might be chosen, Mr. Thomas Van Ness resigned on July 1, 1912. The church extended the date to July 1, 1913, giving him leave of absence during the extra year, so that he might thereby claim a full twenty-year pastorate. A farewell gift of ten thousand dollars was presented to him.

In his final sermon on May 12, 1912 before the dismantling of the edifice began, Mr. Van Ness mustered the courage to advocate changes in the form of government followed by the church. He decried the slow, subtle process through which government by the congregation in many New England churches had gradually been supplanted by the paternalistic administration of a little group of pew-proprietors. General subscribers to the maintenance of the church and its many activities no longer had any voice in the policies, guidance or plan of administration. Church members were not given the right to select the type of worship services or

clergymen they might prefer. The time had come, he advised, to break up a system of government that failed to be representative, democratic and congregational in temper and spirit. A *Boston Herald* editorial favorably echoed his remarks.

Prior to 1893, it had been considered a virtue to keep out of the pulpit anyone who was not a Christian. Mr. Van Ness liberated his congregation's thinking on this matter, and thereafter Jews, Moslems and Hindus were given an attentive hearing in the church. In later years this clergyman traveled widely, visiting Russia five times, and interviewing many leading revolutionists. At the time of his death in Boston on March 14, 1931, Thomas Van Ness was preparing for publication impressions he had received in private meetings with ten important personages, including Count Tolstoi and Sun Yat Sen, founder of the Republic of China. He had already authored *The Religion of New England*.

Chapter Eight

A NEW SPIRE ON BEACON STREET

Proudly the Standing Committee of the Second Church in Boston announced in January 1912 that it had decided to purchase some choice land at the corner of Beacon Street and Audubon Road (now called Park Drive). An architect would be commissioned to design a new building surpassed in beauty by no other Boston church. It would be located in a notable residential area near Brookline, three blocks from Boston University and only two miles from Copley Square in downtown Boston. A liberal church here might become a strengthening influence in the lives of students from a school soon destined to become the nation's ninth largest.

The church constituency remained together loyally during the next thirty months when it lacked a worship home of its own. Services were held regularly in Boston University's Jacob Sleeper Hall on Boylston and Exeter Streets. The list of guest speakers at these hours of worship reads like a *Who's Who* of American Unitarian ministers.

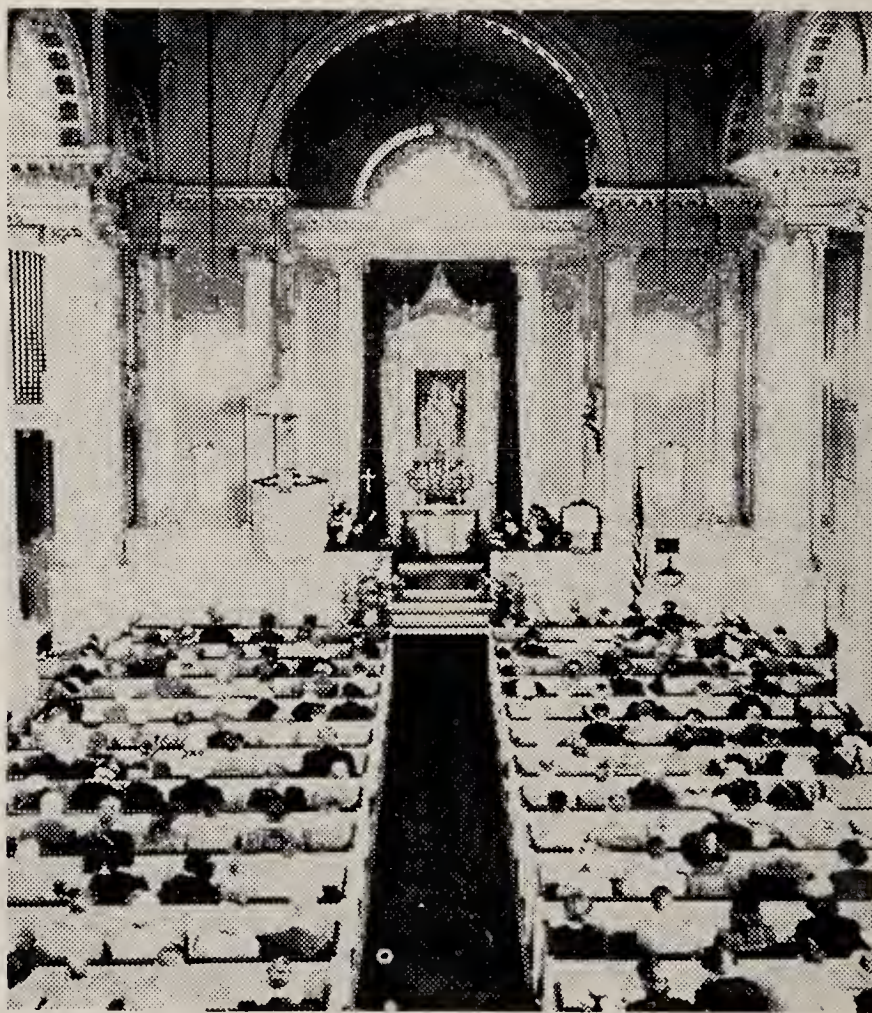
Before the building was completed, Samuel Raymond Maxwell was called from the Unitarian Church in Greenfield, Massachusetts, and installed as the fourteenth pastor on May 20, 1914. The First Church in Boston lent its sanctuary for the occasion. Participating in the service were a number of Unitarian leaders: Charles E. Park, Samuel A. Eliot, Louis C. Cornish, Sydney B. Snow, and Edward Augustus Horton.

What happened to the carefully dismantled Copley Square building? Its attractive front wall stones, all carefully numbered, were carried to Helms Place in 1918 and reassembled without change as the face of the new Church of All Nations. It can still be seen serving faithfully the Morgan Memorial's well-known center of worship.

The excitement that hung over Boston on Sunday afternoon, November 8, 1914, was not caused by the great war that had just broken out in Europe. Hundreds of people were converging on 874 Beacon Street for the dedication of an architectural masterpiece, sometimes described as one of the most stately and distinctive structures in America. The architect was Ralph Adams Cram, designer of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New

York City. Into this eighth building of the Second Church in Boston stepped the presidents of Harvard University, Boston University, Radcliffe College, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the deans of the four major New England theological seminaries and dignitaries from many faiths and walks of life.

From afar they had glimpsed the English Georgian stone steeple of Sir Christopher Wren design, rising 157 feet into the air (six feet higher than the Statue of Liberty in New York). The church sanctuary and parish house of Indiana limestone and Harvard red brick were derived from English and American Renaissance designs of Georgian colonial style. The worshipers that Sunday thrilled, as countless thousands have ever since, to the impressive and expansive feeling of the interior. Because the windows were of clear, not stained glass, natural light of the outdoors flooded the sanctuary, dramatically disclosing its balanced form and color lightness.



The sanctuary of the Beacon Street edifice

European visitors noted that the barrel-vaulted side aisles and the high nave were reminiscent of Italian Renaissance, rather than English. The placement of the Ionic colonnades and the coffered ceiling of the clerestory reminded them of the lovely church of San Lorenzo in Florence, Italy. A sense of height and airiness was achieved by the clerestory above the nave. The building was loftier and narrower than any true colonial structure although the raised pulpit was in the Early American fashion. "A building of intellectual type, yet designed for a rich art of worship," was the verdict placed upon the new edifice by a prominent art critic.

From that dedicatory day to this, the church has stood as a proud landmark on Boston's Beacon Street, an inspiring home for the Hub City's second oldest congregation. The basement and three floors of the parish house are connected by the first elevator ever installed in a Boston church. The top floor contains a nursery room, kitchen and dining room, the latter named for Paul Revere. On the middle floor are the senior minister's study and a single large room, with fireplace, named for the Mathers. An oil portrait of Increase Mather, his face ruddy from a fire's glow as he sat for the painter through winter afternoons, hangs above the fireplace mantle. Interesting mementoes from the early days of the church's existence adorn the walls.

On the main floor of the parish house is the large Lathrop Room with a stage and a painted portrait of John Lathrop, "the Revolutionary Preacher." Offices for the Minister of Education and Church Secretary adjoin this popular room. The basement houses six School of Religion classrooms, a choir room, a fireproof vault for historical records and the Franklin F. Raymond Memorial Chapel for Children. This beautiful little sanctuary, complete with air-conditioning, an organ, a chancel and pew space for sixty, is the regular worship center for part of the Sunday School.

In 1914 a simple statement of the underlying belief of the church began to appear on the front page of the printed weekly calendars: "This church accepts the religion of Jesus, holding, in accordance with his teachings, that practical religion is summed up in love to God and love to man."



A view toward
the west gallery
of the church

Samuel Raymond Maxwell's conception of religion was emphatically traditional, symbolic and liturgical, grounded in the cross of Christianity. He proceeded at once to deepen the Episcopal flavor and form of the worship services. The use of Psalms in a separate book was abandoned in favor of a new prayer book that drew heavily from orthodox sources and lightly from a few nineteenth-century Unitarian writers. Kneeling-benches for prayers were placed among the pews. The members of the choir were brought down from the gallery and, dressed in vestments, opened and closed the services in processional and recessional marches. They were led to and from special choir stalls in the chancel by a crucifer and acolyte bearing, respectively, a high cross and the American flag. Altar candles were ceremoniously lighted and extinguished at the start and finish of each Sabbath service. Messrs. Cram and Maxwell designed a giant Maltese cross to be suspended high in the peak of the chancel entrance, emulating the great cross in the Cathedral of Milan.

At the time of the First World War, the many rooming houses and apartments that now surround the church were single residences for upper class, proper Bostonians. Mr. Maxwell, an excellent preacher and beloved minister, drew a large number of these families. Unfortunately the congregation gained a reputation for being somewhat exclusive and snobbish. This impression was enhanced by the Sunday morning ushers, who wore morning

clothes and gray gloves and carried silk top hats. Many a potential member is said to have glanced inside the door and then fled in terror at the sight of the regal gathering within! During the week, however, the church carried on extensive activities in behalf of soldiers, sufferers and refugees overseas.

Mr. Maxwell served as chaplain of several Masonic and I.O.O.F. lodges and was in demand as a speaker for various colleges. He became a trustee of his own alma mater, The Meadville Theological School, from which, following a short career in teaching, he had graduated in 1906.

Samuel Raymond Maxwell wished to create a church attractive to the neighborhood rather than a pulpit offering strong liberal leadership for Greater Boston. Consequently the services, sermons and programs reflected a conservative, priestly religion. This did not foster in the church an adequate zeal for social service or attract leaders in metropolitan Boston's educational, humanitarian and political life. Religious liberals of the day tended to wend their way into more progressive churches. When Mr. Maxwell terminated his ministry in 1919, a considerable number of persons, feeling no especial attachment to any abiding "cause" or distinctive "faith" represented and upheld by the Second Church, quietly withdrew. In playing down a wider commitment to Unitarianism and its dynamic principles, the congregation had failed to develop a cohesive center of larger loyalty, one that would be more enduring than either the pastor or the parish.

Chapter Nine

IN OUR LIFETIME

The Second Church in Boston became known far and wide as the home of brilliant religious pageants during the next ten-year period under the leadership of a tall, knightly man named Eugene Rodman Shippen. On occasion these dramatic festivals so packed every seat in the church and adjoining halls that hundreds had to be turned away.

Born January 30, 1865, the son of a distinguished Unitarian minister, Dr. Shippen was educated at Harvard and Oxford and was McQuaker Trust Lecturer in Scotland during 1908. During an eight-year pastorate in the Unitarian Church in Detroit, Michigan, just prior to coming to the Second Church, he had been active in suffrage and social hygiene movements and had initiated the Citizens' Committee that resulted in the clean-up and reorganization of the Detroit House of Correction.

A parish letter of September 20, 1920, at the start of his Boston ministry, indicates that he was serving, either as a trustee or a director, the Meadville Theological School, Tuckerman School, Benevolent Fraternity of Unitarian Churches, Norfolk House Center, Unitarian Historical Society and other institutions. He was the founder and first president (in 1922) of the Religious Arts Guild, an organization engaged in promoting the interests of the fine arts in their relation to public worship. Early in the century he had been among the first Protestants in America to work influentially in this field. During and after his ministry, he represented the American Unitarian Association on special missions to Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Palestine, and the Philippines.

Dr. Shippen imported from Oxford its May Day Festival and the Tournament of the Golden Rose. With the aid of his gifted wife he wrote and produced, according to religious arts authority Von Ogden Vogt, "perhaps the most beautiful Nativity pageant in America." For one of his Memorial Day services the church presented as speaker Calvin Coolidge, the Governor of the Commonwealth.

Protests within the church over the lengthy and conservative form of the monthly Communion service inspired the minister to introduce in November, 1928, a symbolic observance, making the

ceremony almost entirely spiritual. The bread and wine remained in view on the altar table but were no longer passed to the congregation. As the pastor partook of the elements in behalf of those gathered together, he spoke of the spiritual communion through which love passes to the worshipers. At last, one century after Ralph Waldo Emerson's resignation over this important doctrinal point, the reform that he had sought was instituted in his own church.

The unremitting pressures of a difficult city church caused Dr. Shippen to go into retirement on November 12, 1929. Many older families were dying out or moving their residences into the suburbs. The stock market crash was soon to begin its insidious work on the financial affairs of Americans everywhere. A new era of struggle was dawning in the life of the Second Church in Boston.

An energetic pulpit committee swiftly examined a number of leading ministerial candidates. On April 1, 1930, less than five months after the retirement of Dr. Shippen, Mr. Dudley Hays Ferrell was at work in the parish. A graduate of Princeton Theological School, he had entered the Presbyterian ministry only to discover that his views were too liberal for that denomination. After serving Unitarian churches in Brockton, Montreal and Lynn, he gave full time to Masonic work for three years. Like Paul Revere, he served several years as Grand Master of the Masons of Massachusetts.

Prior to Mr. Ferrell's arrival at the Second Church he was Relief Commissioner of the Grand Lodge, Director of the Service Department, Director of Education and Director of the Masonic Home at Charlton, Massachusetts. For many years a prodigious worker, he seems to have burned himself out, for on September 15, 1932, in his Swampscott home, he died at the age of fifty-three. His pastorate had been of a quiet, conservative nature with little change in the church's life.

After a year of guest preachers, the pulpit was filled by Mr. DuBois LeFevre on October 1, 1933. A graduate of Rutgers in 1914, and the Union Theological Seminary in 1917, he had served the Dutch Reform Church until his theological views found their

true denominational alignment. Unitarian parishes in Newburgh, New York; Meadville, Pennsylvania; and Youngstown, Ohio, preceded his call to Boston.

In a time of difficult economic conditions, Mr. LeFevre tried to democratize the church and make it more congenial to people in the immediate neighborhood. A Tuesday Evening Club was organized for women who worked in the daytime. He omitted the "Statement of Faith" from the morning service, feeling that it had no place in a creedless church. Typical sermon topics of the thirties included: "Hitler — Messiah or Madman?" "When the Wicked Triumph What Will the Righteous Do?" "The Price of Progress" and "Can Religion Save Democracy?"

A bronze tablet to the memory of Dr. and Mrs. Edward Augustus Horton was placed on a wall of the sanctuary in 1935. It joined other plaques dedicated to Dr. and Mrs. Chandler Robbins, Dr. Henry Ware, Jr., Frederick Walker Lincoln, Frank Norman North, Lamont Giddings Burnham, Ellen Sophia Brown and General Wilmon Whilldin Blackmar, who, at his death, was Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic.

The country was emerging from the depression and moving toward the most terrible war in history when Mr. LeFevre terminated his ministry in the spring of 1940. Prominent clergymen again answered an appeal for help, supplying the pulpit during the next fifteen, leaderless months. Among the casualties of this interim period was the famed annual Pageant of the Nativity. After twenty years of uninterrupted presentations it quietly died out. No one can calculate the harmful effects upon the church's strength of the long gaps allowed to develop between pastorates. Parishioners expired, moved away or lost interest and were replaced by a mere trickle of newcomers. The neighborhood was witnessing a conversion of its well-to-do private homes into apartment houses occupied by a semi-transient population. To sustain its strength in the face of steady losses, the church needed to maintain unrelenting pressure in every aspect of its work.

The Standing Committee boldly faced the problem of regaining vitality in two ways. It knew that the Church of the Disciples,

founded by James Freeman Clarke nearly a century earlier, at nearby Peterborough and Jersey Streets, was closing its doors forever. An amalgamation of its congregation and assets with those of the Second Church would solve a number of immediate mutual problems. Although a few members did transfer to this church, the negotiations ended a year later when the Church of the Disciples decided to join the less liturgical and more liberal Arlington Street Church. A grain of consolation was left in the thought that, although merger negotiations had also failed earlier with the Church of the Unity and the South Congregational Church, the Second Church had outlived them all.



The sanctuary: Doric columns, wall memorials

Undaunted, the Standing Committee then decided to experiment, borrowing fifteen thousand dollars in order to make an offer that might attract a pulpit orator capable of restoring the church to its former power and influence. Its call was accepted by the Rev.

Walton E. Cole, who in nine years had built up a major congregation in Toledo, achieved fame by vigorous radio messages and several inspirational books, and been active in civic, educational and social work. His studies had taken him through the University of Chicago and the Chicago Theological Seminary. On September 1, 1941, he started his work in the Second Church.

Emphasizing the pulpit ministry, Dr. Cole's sermons received an unprecedented amount of space in the public press. Responding to the challenge of the war years, he dealt frequently with patriotism, fascism, defeatism and prejudice, warning that the war could be won only if the values of the altar were combined with the power of the arsenal.

Selected by King's Chapel and the First Church in Boston to deliver the 1942 Minns Lectures, he later prepared the six talks for publications as a book, *Realistic Courage*. Another volume, *Standing Up To Life* appeared during his Boston pastorate. The reputation and message of the Second Church were further spread across New England by Dr. Cole's Saturday evening radio broadcasts over WMEX. During the summers he substituted on Dr. Carl Heath Kopf's popular "Window on Beacon Street" radio broadcasts. Overflow crowds assembled on six consecutive Sunday evenings during the Fall of 1944 to hear lectures based upon the most recent and authoritative books designed to help people "Know Your Allies." Documentary motion picture films accompanied each presentation.

Garland Junior College, Wheelock College, the Boston School of Occupational Therapy, and similar institutions began to hold their annual commencement exercises in the church edifice.

In April 1945, Dr. Cole announced that he was terminating his ministry at the end of the summer in order to accept a call to the First Congregational Church in Detroit, Michigan.

Sunday congregations had grown markedly, but the problem of building up the church itself had not been solved. The commendable experiment had introduced a receptiveness to more vigorous methods of publicity and churchmanship, and it had taught one effective lesson. A strong pulpit figure must remain with his church long enough to consolidate any gains and, at the same

time, succeed in securing from newcomers a genuine commitment to the institution itself. Otherwise the values inherent in the church as an enduring force in the community can not be preserved.

Much of the impetus given to the church's progress by Walton E. Cole was lost as a result of an eighteen-month interval before the nineteenth minister arrived on January 1, 1947. The Rev. G. Ernest Lynch was one of a remarkable group of men who have worked as ministers of education in the Second Church while studying in Boston theological schools. Well-known present-day Unitarian clergymen in this coterie include John R. Baker, Robert Raible, Waitstill H. Sharp, Kenneth C. Walker, and Edwin H. Wilson.

Mr. Lynch had received degrees from Duke University in 1934 and Harvard Divinity School in 1937. Eight years' leadership of the First Parish (Unitarian) in Portland, Maine, had brought him national recognition for a weekly young people's radio program he had conducted for the Maine Council of Churches.

After being in the brilliant glow of newspaper headlines during Dr. Cole's ministry, the Second Church in Boston suddenly moved into twilight. Its activities no longer seemed to excite the press; congregations dwindled; and a deep conservatism settled over the worship services. Even the four-day tercentenary observance of the church's founding failed to stir the city. The minister added a silver pectoral cross to the raiment worn by the crucifer. A valuable paten veil made in 1825 and originally used at the cathedral in Milan was given to the church to cover the communion bread and wine. Perhaps some inkling of what was happening within Mr. Lynch's mind could have been detected in his sermons on: "The Mother of Jesus", "The Holy Family," and "In the Beginning, God."

Abruptly, in the summer of 1949, G. Ernest Lynch resigned, announcing that he was going into the Trinitarian ministry of the Episcopal Church. Although several pastors of the Second Church had come to its pulpit after giving up earlier careers in other faiths, two men in succession had now departed this church for more orthodox denominations.

Fortunately a vigorous eight-year ministry under the Rev.

Clayton Brooks Hale was launched on January 1, 1950. Energetic in body and poetic in spirit, the youthful Mr. Hale breathed a challenging sense of opportunity into the parish. The new pastor had studied at Tufts University, Crane Theological School, and the Andover-Newton Seminary. Enlisting with the Royal Air Force, he flew night missions until 1943, when he received a medical discharge. His unusually productive work at the Channing Church in Rockland, Massachusetts, from 1944 to 1949 drew him to the attention of the Boston Pulpit Committee.



A service in the Children's Chapel

Soon after his arrival, the Franklin H. Raymond Memorial Chapel in the basement was completed by the Men's Club. Excellent congregations responded to his unusual sermon titles and colorful advertising methods. Mr. Hale was an advocate of conservative Channing Unitarianism while maintaining earnestly the liturgical service and symbols introduced by his predecessors across the preceding century.

As part of his community work, Mr. Hale was a trustee of Garland Junior College, a director of the Religious Arts Guild, an executive committeeman with the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People, and served two terms as president of the Boston Council of Churches. He was a constant fighter for Negro rights and much honored by that section of the population for his influence and work.

Newspapers and magazines from coast to coast front-paged the tragically unworthy reaction of a small segment of the congregation when he announced, during a 1956 sermon, that he proposed to engage a Negro assistant minister the following Fall. Threats of withdrawals and financial boycott followed. But the Standing Committee, despite strong pressure, backed him by ten votes to three. Many members of the vocal minority resigned from the church undermining some of the progress that had been made. The parish, as a whole, however, had proudly remained true to its highest ideals. It is generally believed that, had the appointment been quietly prepared ahead of time and then made without fanfare, no more than a slight reaction would have occurred.

Under the inspiration of Mr. Hale, six young men of the church resolved to enter the Unitarian ministry: Peter Arthur Baldwin, Victor Howard Carpenter, Jack Currie, Randall Lee Gibson, Todd James Taylor and Robert Wrigley. This was a high tribute to the Second Church pastor's ability to demonstrate the attractiveness of the ministry as a career and the distinctive contribution a man can make to human society by dedicating his life to its service. Clayton Brooks Hale resigned his pastorate on December 31, 1957, to accept the call of a church near his home in Maine.

Although the relentless demands and pressures of a big city church were causing pastorates to become increasingly shorter, the historic Old North Church had still been led by only twenty senior ministers in the 308 years of its existence.

Chapter Ten

THE OLD NORTH IN A NEW AGE

On a beautiful, sunny August 1, 1958, the present minister of the Second Church in Boston moved his personal library into the colonial edifice and began his work. (See Appendix D for biography.) A number of major problems in finance, membership, influence and organization confronted the church which the Standing Committee agreed must be boldly met. The changes in the form of worship and the nature of the pulpit ministry recommended by the minister understandably caused significant emotional upheavals among some of the older, honored parishioners. But the trustees gave their cooperation and the parish as a whole accepted the innovations.

The main project facing the church lay in the area of worship. New England Unitarianism has long been regarded (though not always accurately) as theologically conservative, socially snobbish and, on public issues, moderately quiet. Today the ministry of the Second Church is attempting to confront this often staid tradition with a universal theological position, a thoroughly democratic church life and a commitment to meet boldly the key problems of our time. A prophetic pulpit is vital to the present resurgence of Unitarian power. In recent months, preaching on social, political and economic inadequacies in the community and the nation has dealt specifically with war mongering, the United Nations, separation of church and state, bloated and inefficient government, excessive taxation and authoritarian religious pressures. While making its voice heard on important public issues, the pulpit is trying not to neglect the hunger in peoples' hearts for strength, assurance and helpful insights in meeting the problems of daily living.

In a not always complimentary manner, the Second Church in Boston had long been designated nationally as the "High Church of Unitarianism." A glance at the Sunday Service would have explained why. At the start and close of worship, a vested choir led by a boy crucifer properly surpliced and bearing aloft a cross moved slowly to and from the mahogany stalls in the chancel. On the altar rested two kneeling angels of metal each supporting a bar of burning candles. These flanked an open Bible, while be-

hind stood a small cross of brass. Two giant blazing candles stood like book ends beside the altar. The officiating clergy wore reversed collars and knelt on benches during fervent prayers. The core of the liturgical service was found in small prayer books similar in form to the Episcopalian *Book of Common Prayer*. Looking down solemnly upon this scene from behind the altar was a life-sized mosaic figure that most visitors took for the Virgin Mary or a mantled Jesus. This completed an almost orthodox setting for the services.

It was clear that marked reactions of horror and perhaps even anger would result from changing any of the liturgy, symbols and practices, some of which had become deeply ingrained by over a century of custom. But it was equally apparent that the church was suffering unnecessarily by retaining worship patterns taken from orthodox denominations whose theology and thinking were exceedingly remote from those of the Second Church.

Ritualistic practice associated with religions of authoritarian, Trinitarian or parochial outlook not only are inappropriate in a free, liberal church but also raise disastrous emotional prejudices in the minds of many newcomers. Better no symbols than the wrong ones — for materialism can suffocate the spirit; clutter can confuse the mind; and mechanical liturgy can lull the senses. Today's liberal church must have a form of worship that is honest in its theology, nourishing in terms of emotional needs and uplifting in its aesthetic standards.

Thus, in 1958-59, the most radical changes in 106 years of worship began. The transformation has been occurring by degrees. The presiding clergymen no longer reverse their collars and now stand at the lectern to lead the worship service. The prayer books have not been restored to the pews; their place has been taken by freshly-created readings less laden with archaic language and more firmly grounded in contemporary allusions. After clearing the altar of its profusion of candles, its brass cross and Bible, a simple centerpiece of fresh flowers has become the focal point. In place of a vested choir of uneven musical quality, a superb quartet has been placed in the west gallery. The Episcopal-oriented crucifer, introduced during the First World War, no

longer marches into the sanctuary. The beautiful simplicity and naturalness of the fundamental elements of worship have become discernible in the service. The new form is truer to the church's earlier liberal heritage; it would please Ralph Waldo Emerson. How ardently he had hoped that religious worship would not become frozen into mechanical ritual, symbolism and terminology.

Another project has been to democratize the government of the church. To change the outmoded arrangement whereby trustees had held unlimited, sometimes almost life-time, tenure of office, a revolving Standing Committee has been established. The governing board now consists of nine members, elected for three years, three of whom go on the committee each year as three others leave. A self-perpetuating investment committee is being changed.

The educational functions and policies of the church were next approached. A fresh structure and revised curriculum have been

developed for the School of Religion. For the adults, a Fireside Forum, Evening Alliance and Sunday Morning Adult Discussion Group have been established. The Parish House is now open for meetings and activities of worthwhile community groups.

The church's relationship to the national Unitarian movement has come under consideration. The affiliation had always been maintained but without much notice or commitment. To correct this, the name "Unitarian" has been placed on all printed literature and added to the outside bulletin boards. Financial campaigns have been officially instituted in support of the Unitarian Service Com-



JOHN NICHOLLS BOOTH
Twenty-first minister

mittee and the United Unitarian Appeal.

Rising costs of rent and the housing shortage have made imperative some action for a church-owned parsonage. Not for 150 years, when Dr. John Lathrop lived in North Square, had the Second Church possessed its own official residence for its senior ministers. A beautiful red-brick home has been purchased at 33 Euston Street in one of Brookline's choice residential areas, a gift by the founder of the Wentworth Institute, Arthur L. Williston, in memory of his first wife. A well-appointed wing behind the building has been converted into a small dormitory for three university students.

A glance backward through the Second Church's history indicates that the revisions of 1958-59 have been entirely in the spirit of its highest moments. A prophetic pulpit characterized the preaching of Cotton Mather. Subjects boiling in the daily press were discussed constantly: schools, courts, piracy, government, charters. Efforts to liberalize the theology of the congregation had been constant endeavors of Samuel Mather, John Lathrop and Henry Ware, Jr. Though the services themselves were relatively plain in the Old North Church of Ralph Waldo Emerson, that eminent pastor had expressed a desire for a greater simplicity, honesty and spirituality in religious worship through the reforms he proposed. A more democratic form of church government — to replace the lifetime control of its internal affairs by a lay oligarchy — had been sought, though not too successfully, by Samuel Checkley and Thomas Van Ness. All these precedents serve to show that the present-day changes in pulpit emphasis, theological position, worship forms and church government are compatible with this church's tradition.

In spite of what has been accomplished even more challenges and strenuous days lie ahead. Much remains undone. The end goals still gleam in the far distance. But the parish is determined to continue moving toward the high beacons it has raised for itself.

Proud of our church's past, our deepest concern is with the responsibilities of the present and a growing vision of the future. We are dedicated to the service of all mankind, the uplift of every

spirit and the freeing of minds from the tyranny of unreason and despair. This church strives to inspire its constituents to reach for the highest goals possible to the human mind and spirit. For a world of tensions, conflict and injustice, it seeks remedies, strength and understanding. In place of dogma, narrow focus and irrelative emphasis, it substitutes a religion of free inquiry, universal outlook and concern for individual and social betterment.

The Second Church in Boston is older than any corporation, court or government in this land. Within its buildings has been unfurled every flag which represents a stage in our nation's growth — from the simple red cross of old England to the present fifty-star flag of the United States of America. During this time its leaders and members have exercised powers and influence that have at times almost controlled the ecclesiastical, civil and educational affairs of the Massachusetts Bay area. So scattered among many institutions are the leaders of present-day Massachusetts that no single church can ever again hold the unique position occupied for so long by this venerable Old North Church.

In this century as the record clearly shows, the church has continued to occupy a leading role in Boston affairs — civic, literary, educational, humanitarian and ecclesiastical — through the work of its ministers and lay people. Difficult periods have not for long weakened its force or silenced its voice. This single church has survived three centuries of shattering conditions in human society because it has had the wisdom to learn, the strength to grow and the courage to innovate. It remains a great institution.

Appendix A

THE OLD NORTH CHURCH MYSTERY

“Where were the Paul Revere lanterns really displayed?”

On the night of April 18, 1775, two lanterns gleamed dimly against the night sky from the steeple of a church in the North End of Boston. That signal sent Paul Revere riding toward Concord and Lexington and ushered in the war that gave independence to this nation.

What church played this key role in early American history?

The display of lanterns might have passed quietly into oblivion had not Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned his epic children's poem, “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere.” The verses state that, in order to hang the lanterns, the sexton:

...climbed the tower of the *Old North Church*,
by the wooden stairs, with stealthy tread
To the belfry chamber overhead.

The best primary account we have by an actual participant in the lantern conspiracy is Paul Revere's letter written on January 1, 1798, to the Reverend Jeremy Belknap, founder of the Massachusetts Historical Society.¹ Twenty-eight years after the event, at the age of sixty-eight, Revere recalled, “... if the British went by water we would show two lanthorns in the North Church steeple; and if by land, one as a signal...”

There exists only one other known reference to the church by a patriot who took part in the clandestine operations of that night. It is in an undated memorandum written afterward by Richard Devens, a member of the Committee of Safety and later commissary general of the colonies.² Revere mentions that Devens came to him as his horse was being prepared for the momentous ride. Devens wrote: “...the signal agreed upon was given: this was a lanthorn hung out in the upper window of the tower of the N. Ch. towards Charlestown.”

The chief problem facing historians has been to determine which church in the North End of Boston was the true *North Church*. Perhaps this is not too important a splinter of history. But it is a curious bit of lore that is in recurring dispute. Exam-

1. Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Volume 16, Page 370 ff.

2. History of Paul Revere's Signal Lanterns, by William W. Wheildon, Page 13 ff.

ining the possibilities, this writer has enjoyed many pleasant hours in detective work among numerous reference volumes and in visits to the North End. The matter is revived here because of fresh information that has been unearthed calling for a revision of a long-standing error in historical identification.

The possibilities have been narrowed definitely to two churches: Christ Church in Salem Street and the Second Church in Boston, then located in North Square. In 1876, the Boston City Council announced that it was going to place a tablet on Christ Church marking it as the famed Old North Church of Paul Revere fame. Such a clamor of protest was raised by citizens from all walks of life that the city established an impartial commission to examine all the available evidence. After two years the members decided unanimously in favor of Christ Church. A tablet to that effect was placed on the church tower, in 1878, and the general public has been led to accept this verdict ever since.

An eloquent defense of the Christ Church position was delivered before this commission of the Boston City Council in December, 1877, by the Christ Church rector, Dr. Henry Burroughs. The Second Church did not push its own case. At the time the commission was appointed, a new clergyman, Robert Laird Collier, was just arriving at the Second Church directly from a charge in Leicester, England. His ministry here was barely longer than the lifetime of the commission, closing in 1879. During this brief term he was inordinately busy ridding his new edifice of a major debt. As he had just come from abroad, his lack of interest in, or background for, the whole controversy is understandable, though it left the church without a personal advocate.

This writer has made a careful review of the evidence considered by the Boston citizens' committee: the 64-page monograph by William W. Wheildon in support of Christ Church entitled *History of Paul Revere's Signal Lanterns* (published 1878 by Lee and Shepard, Boston), the 12-page presentation by Richard Frothingham in support of Second Church entitled *The Alarm on the Night of April 18, 1775*, a sermon-address by the Rev. Henry Burroughs and numerous other pertinent documents. Mr. Wheildon's dissertation in behalf of Christ Church is discredited by numerous factual

errors — two of which are corrected in footnotes by his own publishers. This work sums up almost the entire Christ Church brief. It seems to have been the source of mis-statements that have crept into Dr. Burroughs' sermons and the writings of other persons on this subject. Mr. Frothingham's sketchy defense of Second Church is simply a letter he addressed to Boston's Mayor Samuel C. Cobb and the City Council on December 28, 1876, at the beginning of the controversy.

These briefs submitted in 1876-78 seemed accurate and probably would have compelled me to vote as the commission did. The citizens' committee became convinced that Christ Church was the institution primarily called *North Church* in Colonial days, and that neighborhood legends supported the contention that in this church its own sexton had displayed the lanterns. The *coup de grace* that seemed to eliminate the Second Church completely was not the contention that it was known as a "meeting house" and not a "church" in Revolutionary times but that triangulation proved lanterns displayed in its steeple could not have been visible in Charlestown because Copp's Hill stood in the way. Christ Church was obviously an excellent signal point, and its steeple was well known to Paul Revere.

Crucial material and arguments that seemed reliable in 1876-78 can now be proven to contain many errors, omissions and misinterpretations. New and more accurate information and insights, not available to the commission, markedly transform the picture and re-establish the claim of the Second Church in Boston to its being the true North Church or Old North Church of Paul Revere renown.

— I —

Which church legitimately held the title North Church or Old North Church, either in 1775 or when Paul Revere and Richard Devens named it specifically in their firsthand accounts?

For sixty-five years after the founding, the Second Church was the *only* house of worship in the North End of Boston. It soon became known colloquially and formally as the North Church or

North Meeting House. Overcrowded congregations under the Mathers prompted an off-shoot church to be gathered in 1714 on Hanover Street. It became officially known as the New North to distinguish it from the original North Church. Many writers continued to call the Second Church the North Church, but numerous others adopted the nickname Old North Church. Captain John Bonner's map of Boston, drawn in 1722, lists the Second Church as the "Old North." The construction of Christ Church did not occur until 1722-1723. It would be unreasonable for us to be asked to believe that the general populace on that exciting April night in 1775 was calling the 52-year-old Christ Church "Old North," when the nearby Second Church, already 126 years old, had enjoyed this title before the Episcopal Church was founded. As a matter of fact, Fleet's *Pocket Almanack* for 1773, published in Boston just two years prior to the lantern episode, lists the two churches respectively as:

Second, or Old North, Rev. John Lathrop, DD.

Christ Church, E. Salem St., Rev. W. Walter, D.D.

Proponents of Christ Church have argued that this title, "Old North", passed from the Second Church *building*, after the British destroyed this older structure in 1776, to the *building* of the Episcopal church. This contention overlooks the presence of the nearby New Brick Church *building* in the North End. It was two years older than the Christ Church edifice and became, on March 31, 1776, the new home of the churchless Second Church congregation. In 1779, the New Brick Church was rightfully incorporated as "Old North, the Second Church in Boston." Thus, through its own age as a building and its own position as the successor-home of the displaced "Old North Church" congregation, it naturally inherited the distinguished title.

Various books up to the middle of the nineteenth century continue to refer in their indexes under "Old North Church" solely to the Second Church in Boston. The notable reference work *The History and Antiquities of Boston* by Samuel Drake, published in 1856, is an example. Christ Church is referred to in this volume by its proper name and not "North Church" or any other title. "Christ Church, Salem Street," is the usual designation for the

church in official maps, registers and books this writer has examined. It would be difficult, therefore, even to support the assertion that Longfellow's generation, living at the time these various books and documents were being published, in mid-nineteenth century, thought of Christ Church when the phrase "Old North Church " was uttered. Indisputably, the true "Old North Church" of history is the Second Church in Boston, though it has shifted its location several times and is no longer in the North End.

In spite of the fact that this name was generally and deservedly confined to the Second Church, examples can be located where Christ Church was referred to in some letters, bills and other documents as "North Church" or "Old North Church." A few writers have attempted to explain away this oddity of two churches, a few blocks apart, receiving the same nickname, on occasion, by saying that the Second Church, being of ancient Puritan background, was known as the "Old North *Meeting House*" and that Christ Church, in distinction, was called "Old North *Church*." The Boston citizens' committee accepted this over-simplified explanation without examining it closely and felt that both Revere and Devens meant Christ Church, not Second Church, when they said that the lanterns were shown in the North *Church* steeple.

This argument sounds plausible. But in actual fact, long before the 1770's, Puritan nomenclature had been declining in usage. The term, "Meeting House," had become a minority usage, something an outsider like British General Howe might employ. The words, "Meeting House," for example, appear on none of the communion silver gifted to the Second Church during the eighteenth century because so many persons had dropped this term. Instead the word "Church" is engraved on all the silver pieces presented to the Second Church during that time. *The New England Weekly Journal* dated February 18, 1728, in describing Cotton Mather's death the previous Tuesday, called him the "Senior Pastor of the Old North Church in Boston." The terms "meeting house" and "church" were already being used interchangeably before Christ Church was organized.

Christ Church's geographical location (only about 100 yards

farthest due north in the cluster of North End churches) does not really account for the occasional nickname. The type of people in the circle that informally used this colloquialism corroborates a different explanation. Actually, its position as the most northerly of Boston's Episcopal edifices explains why some persons in, or working with members of that denomination would refer to it as the North Church in their own passing notations, despite the presence of another church that the public in general was already calling the North Church. Eventually this practice produced the various instances that are cited by Christ Church, many of which are by Episcopal clergymen. This origin of the usage is mentioned on page 22 of Mr. Wheildon's dissertation.

This writer has searched the archives of the births, marriages, and deaths registry in the Boston City Hall Annex for records in which, according to some writers, Christ Church is often called North Church. We are well aware that if the clerk in the Registry Department happened to be close to Episcopal circles he might record Christ Church as the North Church. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the recorder or clerk was William Cooper. Christ Church records show that burial services for the one-day old daughter of a William Cooper were conducted on September 1, 1795. However, this whole question seems to be academic. With the exception of one book on cemetery internments, no records appear to exist to support the contention that vital statistics records usually called Christ Church anything but Christ Church.

We do know that it was often customary to place each church's name at the head of a column in the registry books. All entries thereafter, by anyone, inevitably had to be placed under whatever headings the clerk of the registry had introduced. The listing of cemeteries in the North district followed this practice. But it is interesting to note that when the information in the internment lists was later transcribed, the designation "North Church Cemetery" was usually corrected, in the new books, to Christ Church Cemetery. It would be unfair, therefore, in the face of this recording system, to suggest that many different people had made any entries, even in the internment book, that indicated that it was their habit to call Christ Church the North Church. In her

book on Christ Church's Colonial period, Mrs. M.K.D. Babcock is careful to avoid citing any records of this kind that were a favorite argument of earlier, less cautious, writers.

It is still necessary to determine, if possible, which church Paul Revere and Richard Devens intended, Christ Church or Second Church, when they referred specifically to the "North Church." Unfortunately, they added no qualifying description to make the designation exact. Mr. Wheildon and Dr. Burroughs, whose various erroneous contentions we will shortly discuss, implied almost dogmatically in their briefs that eighteenth-century records and folklore point to Christ Church as *the* North Church. Hence, they said, Paul Revere could have meant no other institution but that one. Let us examine some more evidence that these gentlemen strongly overlooked!

The many old records quoted or reproduced in Mary Kent Davey Babcock's official Colonial period history of Christ Church, except in the one chapter on "The Old North Church of Paul Revere Fame," refer exclusively to it as "Christ Church" and not the "North Church" or "Old North Church." Even Mr. Wheildon concedes on page 24 of his Paul Revere lantern treatise that Second Church was called "North Church" in Paul Revere's day, though many people used the prefix "Old." During the several generations that Second Church had been the only house of worship in the North End, and had *exclusively* held the name "North Church," that designation had become so well established that many people (of whom Paul Revere appears to have been one when he wrote the description of his famous ride in 1798) continued to use the phrase into the nineteenth century.

Most of the mentions of Christ Church as North Church appear only in clerical entries, bills, memoranda or letters. There are allegedly a few in town records. In the case of the Second Church the designations, North or Old North, were practically official names or sub-titles, both with the church and with the public, rather than just occasional nicknames adopted for denominational or geographical clarification. They went beyond the colloquial into virtually an accepted custom. Hence the name North Church is found repeatedly in formal printed sermons, invitations, books,

almanacs and published death notices. This was rarely the case with Christ Church. The 320 page official history of the church by the Rev. Chandler Robbins, published in 1852, was entitled, *A History of the Second Church, or Old North, in Boston*. Formally printed documents designed to meet many eyes would employ only names that the general public was likely to know, recognize and be using.

The following examples are mostly from documents by professional people who generally used words carefully; they are not from single bills of sale, informal letters, or hastily-written clerical notations. They cover over a century of time from 1675 until 1779. The illustrious Chief Justice Samuel Sewall, a man of proper legal mind, usually, though not always, called the Second Church "ye North." The will drawn up for Abigail Foster dated March 1, 1710-11, says: "I give and bequeath to the North Church in Boston the sum of twenty pounds in Plate for the use of the Communion Table to be delivered to the Deacons of the 2nd Church." Samuel Mather's published life of his father, Cotton, contains this description: "The Very Reverend and Learned Cotton Mather, D.D. & F.R.S., Late Pastor of the North Church, Boston, who Died February 13, 1727-28." In the archives of the Massachusetts Historical Society under "Boston - Second Church" are sermons and essays of long ago on which are printed, "A Sermon to the North Church in Boston" or "...kept by the North Church in Boston." Just one year before Paul Revere's ride, Mills and Hicks's, *British and American Register, 1774, With An Almanack*, printed in Boston and widely circulated for use in "all the New England provinces," gives this listing on page 67:

1650, North Church, Rev. John Lathrop

1722, Christ-Church, E. Rev. M. Byles, jun., D.D.

In October 1779, an invitation to the ordination of the Rev. Mr. Joseph Eckley, new minister of the Old South Church, was extended to the Second Church members who were addressed as "The North Church, under the pastoral care of the Rev. Mr. Lathrop."

In the light of all this evidence, demonstrating widespread usage and printed in carefully worded, important documents over

a long period, it is clear that the edifice generally accepted as the North Church or Old North Church was that of the Second Church in Boston, in North Square, the church that Paul Revere and Richard Devens specifically named in their written accounts.

— II —

The major charge against the Second Church which understandably played a decisive role in swaying the Boston commission's decision is perhaps best summed up in a paragraph in the chapter entitled: "The Old North Church of Paul Revere Fame," found in the excellent 271-page history of Christ Church, written in its behalf by Mary Kent Davey Babcock. Of Second Church, she says:

"... it is a well known fact that the North Meeting House was the only one of the four churches in the North End without a steeple. By triangulation it was shown that no light displayed anywhere in the North Meeting House could possibly have been seen in Charlestown; moreover Copp's Hill at that time was ten feet higher than at present and would have barred effectually the signal."

If this statement were accepted as true, and the Boston Commission apparently saw no alternative, it obviously eliminated the Second Church. All argument had to end here. This one allegation appeared so valid, that it overbalanced the weighty evidence otherwise favoring the case of the Second Church in Boston. But Mrs. Babcock's assertion, part of which she obtained from Mr. Wheildon, happens to be incorrect on all points.

The citizens' commission should have known that in the North End during the Revolutionary period there were at least *five* church edifices: The Old North Church (founded 1649): the New North Church (founded 1714), The New Brick Church (founded 1721), Christ Church (founded 1722-23) and Samuel Mather's Tenth Congregational Church founded in 1741 after his dismissal from Second Church. A glance at any of the several sketches in existence of the Second Church, in North Square, clearly shows that it did possess a steeple. An ironical example is an engraving by Paul Revere himself, published in the January 1774 edition of the *Royal American Magazine*, and entitled "A View of the Town of Boston with several ships of war in the harbor," in which the

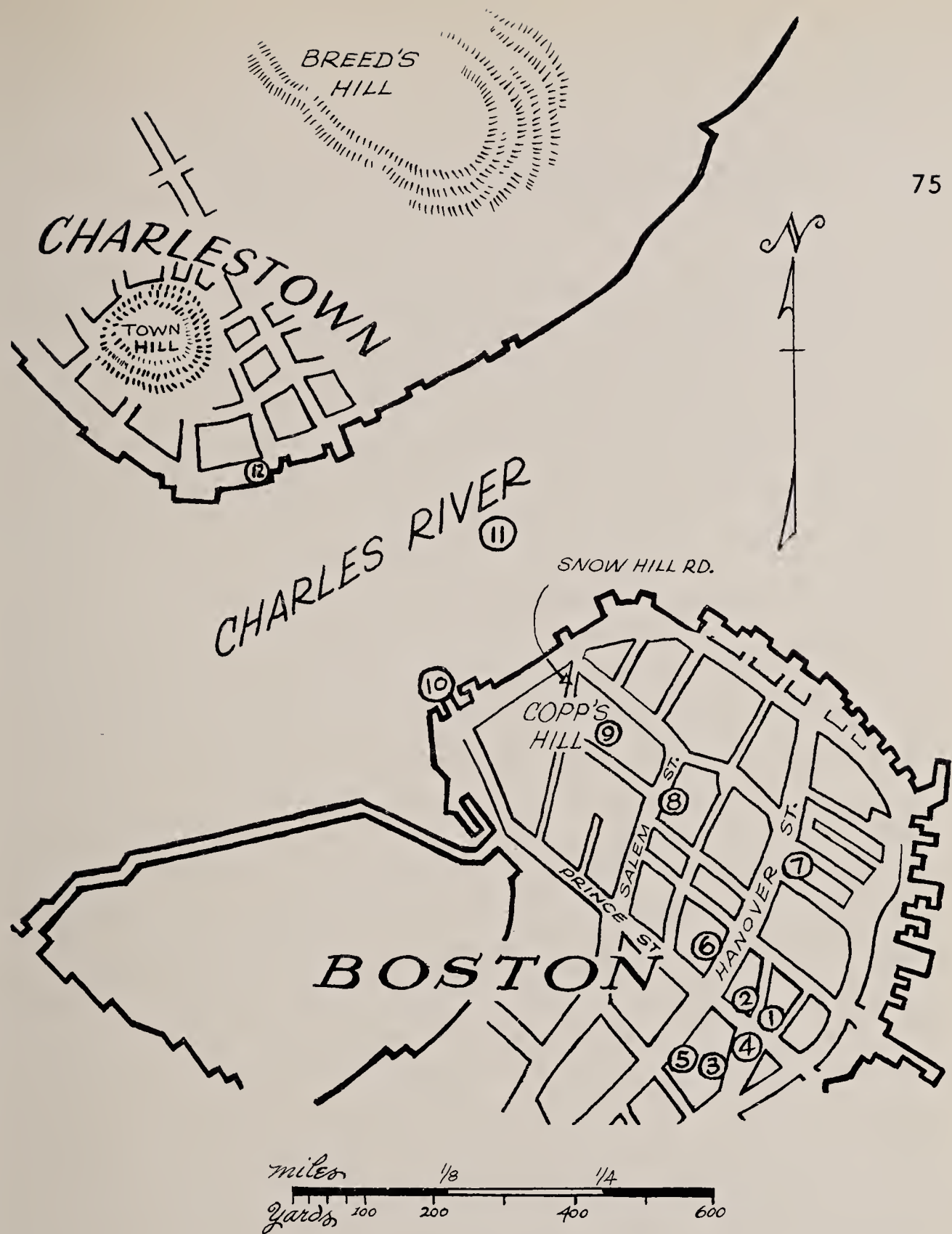
church and its steeple are prominently seen. Or glance at the five North End Churches and their steeples in Wm. Price's famed painting of Boston harbor made in the eighteenth century.

Webster defines a steeple as "a tower or turret tapering to a point." If Mr. Wheildon and others were quibbling that the Second Church possessed a tower and not a steeple, and that the words had a different meaning long ago, in spite of Webster's definition, they should have been reminded that Richard Devens himself, in the eighteenth century, wrote of "the upper window of the *tower* of the N. Ch. . ."

Richard Devens' reference to the "*upper window of the tower*"



Boston's North End in Price's 1743 painting



*BOSTON'S NORTH END and CHARLESTOWN
APRIL 18th 1775*

Davis ⁵⁹

Map of Boston's North End: April 18, 1775

KEY TO MAP

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| (1) Old North Church | (7) New North Church |
| (2) Sir Henry Frankland's House | (8) Christ Church |
| (3) Paul Revere's House | (9) Burying Place |
| (4) North Square | (10) Ferry Landing |
| (5) New Brick Church | (11) Warship "Somerset" anchored |
| (6) Samuel Mather's Church | (12) City Square |

has been seized upon by several pro-Christ Church writers in an effort to discredit the Second Church's case. Among them were the Episcopal clergyman Dr. John Lee Watson, who was reported in the *Proceedings* of the Massachusetts Historical Society for November, 1876, and Henry C. Kendall writing in the *Boston Sunday Herald*, April 4, 1921. They have claimed that Price's 1743 painting of Boston shows that the Old North had only one set of windows or openings in the entire tower. They failed to add that Mr. Price's excellent picture depicts only the top of the tower where, of course, only one set of windows is visible. The old sketch of the church reprinted earlier in this volume shows the full steeple with its lower and upper openings. Richard Devens was right: the lanterns would be shown in an upper window of the tower.

The writer has sought a charitable explanation for the grave and untrue charge that triangulation proved no one in Charlestown could see a light displayed anywhere in the Second Church because of Copp's Hill. It may be that the surveyor took a line from the point where Paul Revere's ride began in present-day City Square, Charlestown, up toward North Square in Boston, assuming, as many people do, that he stood there with his horse awaiting the signals. But Paul Revere, himself, never saw the lanterns. The horseman's account states simply: "They landed me on the Charlestown side. When I got into town, I met Colonel Conant and several others; they said they had seen our signals." We are not informed where his associates were situated to watch for them.

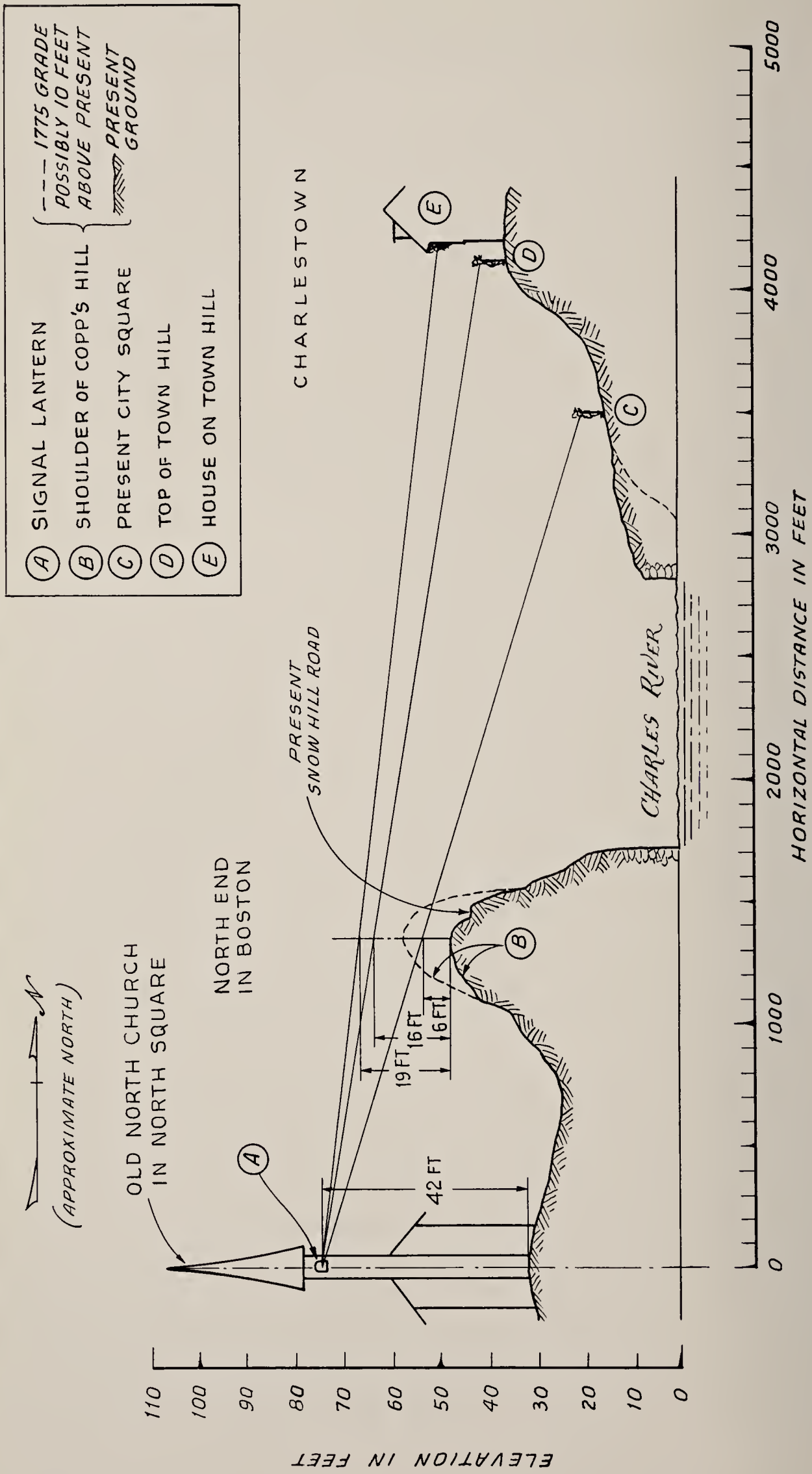
There were several possible vantage points close to City Square, Charlestown, from which the lanterns in the Second Church steeple could have been clearly visible. The patriots could have strolled a few hundred feet westward from the ferry landing, along the river bank. From there a good view toward North Square was possible with less obstruction from the downward sloping shoulder of Copp's Hill. Town Hill lay only 200 paces back from City Square and the river's edge, in a direct line between City Square and Boston's North Square, about 1400 yards away. The Town Hill elevation is about 34 feet today; it was undoubtedly higher

in 1775. Houses atop this original settlement area of Charlestown enabled one to gain increased elevation. Or the patriots could have climbed the heights of 62-foot Breed's Hill, only 500 paces from the spot where history says that Revere began his ride. Both Town Hill and Breed's Hill possessed broad, flat tops offering many possible angles or positions for sighting purposes. The North Church in North Square, was only about 300 yards farther from City Square in Charlestown than Christ Church, in Salem Street, so that the whale oil lamps of Revolutionary days would have been almost equally visible from either point at night.

The steeple of Second Church reportedly rose about 73 feet into the air. The knoll on which it stood in North Square is today 33 feet in elevation. Like most hills in this section it was probably higher in 1775 before earth was scraped away to fill in the nearby shoreline. After Copp's Hill itself, it has always been one of the highest points in the North End. The steeple windows were forty to fifty feet above the ground, judging from engravings, so that they opened out at least 73 to 83 feet above the river waters, and probably much more. The published height of Copp's Hill in 1775, at its maximum point near the southwest corner of the Burial Ground, was 58 to 65 feet above the Charles River. The height is only an academic matter, in this discussion, because the main bulk of the hill has always stood to the eastward of a direct line of sight from City Square or Town Hill in Charlestown to North Square. The eyes follow a course just eastward of the easy upward slope of Prince Street connecting the waterfront to the Square.

An engineer, Clyde W. Hubbard, and the writer have carefully gone over all this ground. Mr. Hubbard has plotted a profile of the lines of sight, crossing the Snow Hill shoulder, correlating a 1956 U.S. Geological Survey Map for the area with the contour levels given in work map No. 92P, dated January 10, 1923, in the office of the Boston City Planning Board in City Hall. After making allowance for the ten or more feet greater height of Copp's Hill in 1775 than today, and not helping the Second Church's case for visibility by including an estimate for the additional height that the North Square knoll and Town Hill must also have

Profile on Line from North Square, Boston to Town Hill, Charlestown



OCTOBER, 1959
C.W. HUBBARD

then possessed, Mr. Hubbard proved that it was a physical possibility for the signal lanterns in the North Square Church to have been readily seen by observers near City Square in Charlestown. The profile for lines of sight from two different points on Breed's Hill disclosed an extraordinary clearance of Copp's Hill. Printed in this appendix is the profile for the much lower Town Hill, just behind City Square, for the reader to examine. A patriot could have sat comfortably at a lower or upper window of his home on Town Hill in the center of Charlestown and received the secret signals without any danger of being observed himself. The tower in Boston could easily be picked out. It rose another 30 feet above the upper window openings.

The belief that the Second Church steeple windows could not have been seen across the river in Charlestown is said to have been the chief consideration influencing the Boston commission's decision favoring Christ Church. Even if careless analysis of the night's event, inaccurate triangulation, or ignorance of the true contours of Copp's Hill deceived members of the citizens' commission, history books should have cautioned their acceptance as fact, if not corrected them.

Lady Agnes, the widow of Sir Harry Frankland, lived on Garden Court Street across the road from the side windows of the Second Church, facing Breed's Hill in the distance. In his book *Invitation to Boston* (M. Barrows and Co., Inc., 1947), A. C. Lyons writes on page 78: "She (Lady Agnes) watched the battle of Bunker Hill from the windows of the old mansion and helped bind up the wounded." Her Colonial home was neither high enough nor so situated as to block a similar view over the river from the belfry windows across the street. Reference to a plan map by S. C. Ellis of the buildings and homes in the North Square and vicinity, in Revolutionary times, hanging in the Lathrop Room of the present-day Second Church in Boston, discloses that no buildings, including Lady Agnes's next-door home, cut off a direct line of sight from the Old North Church itself to Charlestown. Therefore, if she could see Breed's Hill clearly, lanterns in the taller church steeple would have been even easier to glimpse from across the river. Price's beautiful 1743 painting of Boston shows buildings

in reasonably proportionate scale. The tower and windows of the Second Church, in North Square, are clearly depicted as rising above the surrounding structures that comprise the small eighteenth century Colonial town.

It is regrettable that the Boston commission was carried away by a line of argument faulty in its conception and therefore incorrect in its conclusions. Although the truth is now coming out, the case of the Second Church was critically hurt in 1876-78 by unjust arguments like these.

— III —

On what basis did Christ Church become seriously considered as the site of the lantern episode? After the Second Church in North Square was torn down and interest in the Paul Revere ride developed, years later, it was almost natural that the only North End Church that might lay some claim to being called North Church, still visible and standing with its dramatically tall spire, should become the focus of stories. This was Christ Church. People would not stop to evaluate carefully whether or not it was *the* true North Church of the two. If there is seemingly a choice of two sites where an interesting event once happened, it is natural for persons in the neighborhood to favor the building they can see rather than bother with the one that has long since been destroyed and gone. Second Church slipped from common view as the lantern locale after the British troops destroyed it.

Traditions and folk stories arising from events clothed in secrecy and danger are bound to develop local rumors and fabrications that, upon continual repetition, finally seem to be unassailable truth. Some families, knowing that their claims could not be doublechecked, would make efforts to associate themselves, if possible, with historic events. So it is with the folk tales that grew up in the North End concerning "who hung the lanterns in which church." As evidence they are usually interesting, sometimes revealing, but never conclusive.

So much romanticized reconstruction has taken place concerning the mysterious lantern carrier, even to describing his every activity that night, that considerable fiction is now repeated as fact. For many years one legend was widely believed that named

John Pulling, a Christ Church vestryman, as the patriot who climbed into the tower with the lanterns. The November, 1876 *Proceedings* of the Massachusetts Historical Society, contains a lengthy, almost categorical, exposition of reasons why John Pulling was assuredly the man. It was written by the Rev. Dr. John Lee Watson, formerly on the clergy staff of Trinity Church, Boston, but then serving a parish in Orange, New Jersey. His assertions were bolstered by a Baptist minister named Henry F. Lane, son of John Pulling's granddaughter, who wrote elsewhere: "When I was a lad I distinctly remember hearing my mother's grandmother, who died in Abington about 1846 in her 99th year, say that her husband hung the lights from the steeple of the 'Old North Church.' "

From the dates given in Mr. Lane's statement (whether or not the deed is correctly attributed) we cannot help but conclude that the elderly lady must have been referring to the church in North Square and not Christ Church. And yet no part of Dr. Watson's or Mr. Lane's declarations are of definitive value to a discriminating historian including their dogmatic contradiction of Christ Church's claim in behalf of its own sexton. This is but another of many hearsay stories available to both sides in the controversy.

Paul Revere's personal account says vaguely: "I left Dr. Warren, called upon a *friend*, and desired him to make the signals." Longfellow's statement that the "friend" was a sexton is no more dependable, historically speaking, than many other parts of this otherwise magnificent poem. It grew out of legends said to be circulating in the North End and the unconfirmed claim put forward years after the event by the son of Robert Newman, Christ Church sexton of 1775. It simply *seemed* logical to invite the sexton to carry out this task. He would have the church keys and know how to climb the tower. But was it necessarily logical in view of the critical, secret nature of the mission?

Many persons have accepted the legend that proposes Robert Newman, rather than John Pulling, as Paul Revere's "friend" who showed the signal lights. Hearsay operates again using circumstantial evidence that is not too convincing. Rendering this legend unstable is the fact that Newman was, we would say

today, a bad security risk, although after the Revolution he wrote letters that would suggest he had always been a loyal patriot. Like most of the Colonists his family originally came from England. His eldest brother Thomas was studying and living in England at the time of the Colonial troubles. British officers chose his mother's home for a billet, and he himself was living there with her at this critical period. Surely the patriots would not have endangered their enterprise with such a man for he would have had to sneak away from his home full of British soldiers at a suspiciously late night hour.

Perhaps it is even stretching a point to call the twenty-three-year-old Robert Newman, who needed money and was of unproven character, a "friend" of the forty-year-old Paul Revere, even though the latter was once a classmate of Newman's older brother. With all the trusted friends at Revere's disposal, it hardly seems possible that such a delicate nocturnal mission would be so lightly delegated.

There is no primary proof whatsoever, anywhere, that Robert Newman was ever involved, questioned or arrested by the British, or that Christ Church was searched that night, on account of the lanterns incident. It seems certain that the British did not know for some time afterward that the signals had been flashed in the North End. Stedman, the English historian, and Newell, in his *Diary*, make no allusions to it. If Christ Church was actually searched, the soldiers evidently concluded that the steeple had not been used for signaling. The building was not damaged or destroyed. But we know without equivocation that a sober, condemnatory judgment was made upon the Second Church eight months afterward. The British tore it down.

This usage for signals, discovered months later, probably is what cost the Second Church its building. On December 14, 1775, General Howe gave orders for its destruction, the only house of worship in all of Boston to suffer this fate. Ostensibly some invalided troops required it for firewood. But the Rev. John Lathrop explodes this idea when he writes that "...there were then large quantities of coal and wood in the town." Records show that the enemy army, during the siege of Boston, had de-

stroyed the tower of the Rev. Jonathon Mayhew's West Church because signals from it conveyed intelligence to the provincial army.* How much more serious was the gleam of those lanterns that preceded the midnight ride of Paul Revere? Those dim lights cost many British soldiers their lives, almost wrecked an important military mission and began the Revolutionary War. The British must have associated the church with some particularly hateful usage, apart from its being a "nest of traitors", for them to pull down so historic a religious edifice.

Whether John Pulling, Robert Newman or someone else was responsible for the lanterns, the arguments are too conflicting, flaw-ridden and rumor-laden to advance seriously Christ Church's case. Actually they hurt it. Two groups have been completely positive about two different men whom they said showed the signals. Obviously one claim was wrong. Both may well have been incorrect. There has never been any assurance that these people's certainty that Christ Church was the lantern church was any more accurate than their confusion over the signaler. Those who were so categorical about the legitimacy of the Christ Church claim and about the identity of the lantern carrier believed equally strongly the many erroneous statements they made about Second Church. They possessed no more authority for their opinion about Christ Church than they did for the mistaken judgments that they circulated against the Second Church edifice. They accepted idle assumptions at their face value.

A minor legend circulating in the North End once asserted that Paul Revere chose the Christ Church because he knew its steeple well, having been a bell ringer there. Actually he was only fifteen years old when he and some other lads had rung the eight lovely English bells, 25 years earlier. Christ Church's right to display a "Revere Pew" today arises only from the fact that one son, Joseph Warren, purchased a pew there, many years later, in 1808. Paul Revere was enthusiastically associated with the New Brick Church on Hanover Street, which became the new home of Old North Church a little later. He was christened there as a

* A plaque on that church's site today erroneously states that the tower was taken down lest signals be sent from it. On that basis many others, including Christ Church, would have been toppled.

baby, served on the Standing Committee as an adult, and was buried from it at death. He knew the New Brick Church and North Church buildings as well or better than Christ Church.

— IV —

The one undeniably true fact about Christ Church is that it possessed a high tower clearly visible all over Charlestown. Yet paradoxically the most damaging reason why the patriots would almost certainly avoid using it for signal lanterns was this very factor. It was so obvious and conspicuous a signal point. *Too* obvious, *too* conspicuous. Like a giant arrow it rose high in the air, dominating the North End, a brilliant landmark up and down the river. No hostile eyes could miss it. The king-sized New Brick Church, with its great steeple and clock, was equally visible everywhere. Paul Revere knew this latter church particularly well because it was his own. Yet he rejected it. Why? Probably because it, too, stood out too prominently.

Boston supported officially the cost of a town clock in the Christ Church steeple. That clock was an especial liability. In an age of few pocket watches, British soldiers on the streets that moonlit night might glance up at any moment to note the time. Authorities disagree as to whether, in the occasional shifting of troops, the only company of British soldiers reportedly quartered in the North End were on Copp's Hill that evening, just a few score yards from the Christ Church tower. There were none stationed in North Square, contrary to the statements of various Christ Church supporters. Even Mr. Wheildon's publishers correct him on this. British officers were definitely billeted in the Newman home directly across the street from the Episcopal church. The British warship *Somerset* lay at anchor in the river just off Copp's Hill, the Christ Church steeple looming directly above its lookouts. They had orders, that April evening, to watch for secret signals between patriots and for citizens trying to leave Boston by rowing across the river. This last order was the reason Paul Revere arranged the signals: he was not sure he could cross the river safely. All of these enemy soldiers and sailors, then, were stationed watchfully (and dangerously) almost in the shadow of Christ Church, while the Old North Church in North Square stood

safe and unattended on the other side of Copp's Hill, away from the enemy military points. Under such circumstances would a man be asked to stand in the Christ Church steeple windows, holding two lighted lanterns steady and long enough to make absolutely sure that they were seen and understood by patriots across the river?

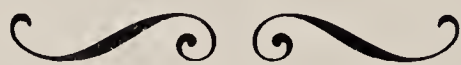
Paul Revere was a shrewd planner. Prominent steeple position, instead of being an advantage would be, he knew, a dangerous handicap. It is reasonable to assume that he would reject Christ Church, as he had passed over the New Brick Church, with their public clocks and openly visible towers, for the lower, clockless and relatively isolated North Church. The less conspicuous steeple would be the superior means of conveying secret signals. It was a better message point, being accessible and suitable, and its lower height, although it made it seem less appropriate, would therefore make it less suspicious to the enemy.

Paul Revere would have had many other reasons for selecting almost naturally the belfry of the Second Church in North Square. He knew the building, its minister and members quite well. His own home in which he lived with his wife, mother and numerous children, was located just a few yards below the edifice, and he had been married to his second wife, Rachel Walker, on October 11, 1773, by its former pastor, Dr. Samuel Mather. To see him near the church, day or night, would arouse no suspicion. His own account of the night's events indicate that when he went home to prepare for the ride, he was not stopped by sentries or soldiers in the vicinity. The steeple was not near or in plain view of an enemy warship, billeted officers, and perhaps even a company of soldiers, like Christ Church. A perfect situation for a dangerous mission in the church belfry.

Belonging to the Second Church were men with whom Revere was conspiring. It was not a Tory stronghold. Confidences would be kept in that company. It would be easy for a "friend" to climb into the steeple, away from all danger points and the troop movements that were starting that night, and flash the signals. Christ Church, on the other hand, was, generally speaking, a Tory institution — a potentially dangerous place in an occupied town for

patriots to select for betrayal lanterns. Its pastor, Dr. Mather Byles, as a Tory chose to leave for Halifax on March 17, 1776, when the British evacuated Boston. Services were suspended in this Church of England building for three years, 1775-1778, because not enough patriot members were left in the North End to warrant resuming them. General Gage worshiped there, and from its tower he watched the Battle of Bunker Hill. Major Pitcairn, of the British forces, upon his death in the Bunker Hill conflict was carried there and buried. British soldiers protected the building in every way from depredation, even after Paul Revere's ride, though other churches were used for stables, living quarters and other purposes.

All these serious disadvantages of Christ Church as an unsafe place from which to send vital intelligence on a night tense with military preparations would occur to beleaguered Revolutionaries, though they might not be so readily apparent to persons looking backward from a place of safety, a century later. They would critically guide the choice of the steeple from which to warn patriots in Charlestown of the impending movement of British troops.



This investigation has left me fully convinced that the signal lanterns of April 18, 1775, heralding the birth of this great nation, were displayed in the steeple of the Second Church in Boston. It is true to say that unless some presently unknown facts are brought to light that incontestably pinpoint the evidence, no one can ever be completely and conclusively positive about the location. But we do know that the ticklish mission to be accomplished and the military situation prevailing that evening made Christ Church almost a ridiculous gamble for secret signals. The North Church steeple near Paul Revere's home was over-

whelmingly the one that careful patriots would choose. Almost all credible assumptions favor that institution.

Let us remember that the 1876-78 decision against the Second Church resulted largely from accepting unreliable hearsay and conflicting folk stories, overlooking unbelievable omissions and mis-statements of readily ascertainable facts, and, crucially, upon believing a question of lantern visibility that was utterly without foundation. The Boston citizens' commission was told that the Second Church had no steeple, no upper windows, and an impossible position for lantern signals. The claim was put forward that it stood opposite enemy troops barracks and was known to all at the time as a meeting house and not a church. It was intimated that Paul Revere selected Christ Church because he knew its steeple better than the others. Efforts were even made by some to deny that the Second Church was known as the North Church. Every one of these arguments was either misleading or untrue. And yet they were believed. Throughout the entire two years of the commission's life the Second Church was formally almost an undefended orphan. Christ Church, through its rector and friends, was vigorously represented. Little wonder the verdict went as it did.

The profusion of facts favorable to the Second Church in Boston are finally supported by the unequivocal statements of Paul Revere and Richard Devens that the lanterns were displayed in the steeple of the North Church. If they had meant Christ Church they would have said so. The true North Church or Old North Church of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the North End of Boston was incontrovertibly the Second Church, in North Square. These designations appear in the authoritative documents of the time and were in general public circulation because it was easily the oldest, most famous church, *the* North Church, of the North End. I can only conclude that it was the church of Paul Revere lantern fame. It remains for the public to weigh the evidence and decide whether or not a generally accepted historical identification has, for a long time, actually constituted an unfortunate error.

I have felt an understandable reluctance to introduce even a

friendly issue vis-a-vis another church on this type of concern. But I am sure that Christ Church advocated its claim in good faith, as I now do ours, and that we both are very much interested in ascertaining what is historically true. It is in this spirit and for this purpose that this research has been undertaken.

I take this opportunity to salute Christ Church, still standing magnificently in its original location. Though the North End neighborhood has changed and that church is no longer a true parish institution, it perpetuates for all to see and appreciate a beautiful structure, rich in historical associations, where many notables have worshiped. To visit the quiet sanctuary is a memorable experience. The Second Church in Boston has lived on as a busy parish church by moving away. Christ Church has survived as a priceless historical and cultural shrine by remaining stationary. Each church continues to serve our country in its own special manner.

Appendix B

MASTERPIECES OF COMMUNION PLATE

Art lovers are invited to examine the church's rare and centuries-old silver communion plate, most of which is stored or exhibited in a special case in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. It includes seven two-handled cups, three tankards, four flagons, a baptismal basin, three dishes, two teaspoons, and a butter knife, all of fine silver. The collection contains silver from the New Brick Church which merged in 1779 with the Second Church in Boston.

Some of the gift pieces were presented during the pastorates of Increase Mather and Cotton Mather. Here one can see the work of Edward Winslow, John Potwine, John Burt, Peter Oliver, Jacob Hurd, and Joseph Goldthwaite. Because these silversmiths were among the most skillful in early America, the value of the collection is in six figures. Most of the silverware is irreplaceable and constitutes one of the finest colonial church sets in the country.

The church has acceded to official requests to borrow pieces from its collection for the MASTERPIECES OF AMERICAN SILVER exhibition in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, January 14 to February 14, 1960, and for the first major exhibition of early American silver ever to be shown in the United Kingdom, in the Central Hall at Christie's, London, in August and September, 1960.

Appendix C

CHURCH LEADERS OF TODAY

In this 310th year of the church's life the following persons comprise the official leadership of the congregation and its activities.

Senior Minister, Dr. John Nicholls Booth; *Minister of Education*, Harold W. Garman; *Minister to College Students*, Garvey F. MacLean; *Organist-Choirmaster*, Dr. James Edward Anliker; *Secretary*, Mrs. Phillis Holloway; *Sexton*, Edmund S. Lane; *Parish Clerk*, Mrs. Florence Remington; *Church Treasurer*, Dr. W. Douglas Richmond; *Assistant Treasurer*, Miss Evelyn Brooks.

Standing Committee. Chairman, Clyde W. Hubbard; Honorary Member, Charles A. Newhall; Harold F. Adams, Miss LaVerne Snyder, William G. Wilkinson, Miss Morna Crawford, Sterling W. Powell, Miss Evelyn Brooks, Garde W. Burgess, Cecil W. Miller.

The chairmen of the various church committees:

Religious Education, Mrs. Kingdon Grant; *Investment Fund*, Walter L. Hobbs; *Special Funds*, A. Lawrence Eastman; *Finance*, Garde W. Burgess; *Board of Charity*, Henry J. Clark; *Deacons and Deaconesses*, Albert Robertson; *Hospitality*, Phillip Guptill; *Ushers*, Robert F. Smiley; *Building and Grounds*, Harvey Burgess; *Housekeeping*, Mrs. Sterling W. Powell; *Music*, Miss Morna Crawford; *Youth*, Philip G. Curtis; *Flowers*, Mrs. A. Stanley Gibson; *Fair*, Mrs. Kingdon Grant and Mrs. Frank Powell; *Parsonage*, Charles A. Newhall; *Unitarian Service Committee*, Mrs. Frank Powell; *Interfaith*, Mrs. Norman W. Strickland; *United Unitarian Appeal*, Gardner Murphy; *Church Historian*, Frederick P. Pond; *Delegates to Boston Council of Churches*, Mrs. Sterling W. Powell; *Delegates to the Benevolent Fraternity*, Miss Virginia Haley; *School of Religion Treasurer*, George Kelley.

Appendix D

SKETCH OF THE MINISTER

JOHN NICHOLLS BOOTH, twenty-first senior minister of The Second Church in Boston. Born August 7, 1912, Meadville, Pennsylvania. B.A. degree, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, 1934; B.D. degree, Meadville Theological School, Chicago, Illinois, 1942; honorary Doctor of Letters degree, Calvin Coolidge College and Portia Law School, Boston, Massachusetts, 1950.

Minister, Unitarian Church of Evanston, Illinois, 1942-48. First clergyman in world to have own regularly scheduled television program, *Looking At Life*, twenty-two months, WBKB, Chicago; President, Evanston Ministerial Association, 1947-48; Member, Program Committee, American Unitarian Association, 1947-49.

Minister, First Church in Belmont, Massachusetts, 1949-57. Panel Member, Massachusetts Council of Churches radio program, CHURCHMEN WEIGH THE NEWS, 1950-52; President, South Middlesex Conference of Unitarian Churches, 1950-52; Chairman, A.U.A. Fellowship Groups Committee, and member Board of Directors of Church of the Larger Fellowship, 1949-54.

Called to Second Church in Boston; commenced August 1, 1958.

Covered Olympic Games for Canadian Press, 1932. Walked across Mexico, Popocatepetl ascent, 1933. Circumnavigated South America, 1939. Eight months circling the world westward, 1948-49, between pastorates. Co-founded Japan Free Religious Association (See *Christian Register*, September, 1948). Interviewed prime ministers of Japan, China, Siam and India, and other Asiatic figures including members of the Japanese Imperial family and the Gandhi family. Expedition across Himalayas into Tibet. Special Correspondent for *Chicago Sun-Times* on this journey.

Toured Yugoslavia and nations of Middle East, 1952. Interviewed President Tito, Premier Mossadegh, Ex-president Inonu, and visited Surchi Kurds with Sir Hubert Wilkins.

Four months in Africa, 1954, Cape Town to Casablanca. Climb on Kilimanjaro. Week at Dr. Albert Schweitzer's hospital. Lived in Timbuctoo. Decorated by King of Morocco: Officer in the Cherifien Order of Ouissam Alaouite.

Circled world eastward in nine months, 1957, between pastorates, emphasizing Himalayan Kingdoms, Indonesian Islands and

New Zealand. Accompanied on march British expedition in Nepal making first ascent of Machapuchare. Lived in longhouses of former headhunting Dayaks, in Borneo jungle. Wrote feature articles for *Boston Globe* on Middle Eastern, African and 1957 world journeys.

Lectures nationally with motion pictures taken during his studies of cultures in remote areas. Author of *The Quest For Preaching Power* (1943), alternate choice of Religious Book Club; *Fabulous Destinations* (1950), selection of Travel Book-of-the-Month Club, and four volumes on conjuring. Pamphlets written for the American Unitarian Association: *The ABC's Of Unitarian Faith*, *The Ministry As A Career*, and *Introducing Unitarianism*. This last document now 375,000 copies in print, most widely distributed pamphlet in Unitarian history.

Dr. Booth is Ministerial Advisor to Unitarian students at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, member of Ministry Committee of American Unitarian Association, member of Books Selection Committee for General Theological Library, and president of the Back Bay Ministers' Association, Boston.

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